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A HISTORY OF
THE OVAMBO
OF
NAMIBIA, c 1880-1935

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ABSTRACT

Patricia Hayes, 'A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, c.1880-1935.'

By the 1880s, when this thesis begins, Ovambo societies on the Cuvelai floodplain were organised into different kingships and polities, highly differentiated in social character. This thesis examines processes of socio-economic change over a period when two separate external forces impinged on the isolated floodplain: firstly merchant capital, followed by colonial rule which favoured mining capital.

In 1884, Ovamboland was nominally divided between Portuguese and German colonial territory, but not occupied until 1915. Merchant capital penetrated the region decades prior to colonisation. From the north, the Angolan slave trade had a diffuse impact long before direct connection in the 1850s. In the south, merchant capital centred on the Cape and Walvis Bay penetrated Ovamboland in the 1860s and drew the larger polities into a competing regional mercantile economy. Christianisation commenced slowly from this time. Prior to colonial occupation migrant labour to southern mines began, but supply never equalled demand. The rinderpest epidemic of 1897 and famine in 1915 accentuated processes of internal socio-economic change already underway since the involvement of political *élites* in long-distance trade.

In 1915 Portuguese forces defeated the Kwanyama and occupied northern Ovamboland. South African officials peacefully occupied southern Ovamboland after their conquest of the German army in South West Africa. The thesis from here concentrates on developments under South African rule. The sharpest political change brought by colonialism was the 'levelling' process of eliminating kings who were too independent and backed by armed supporters and the up-grading of headmen as substitutes where kings were

removed. Co-operative kings and senior headmen then held authority in a system of indirect control by a few colonial officials - later held up as a model of 'indirect rule.'

Colonialism primarily targeted Ovamboland as a labour source, but the state's ability to increase and systematise contract labour was limited. Labour demand from the mining heartland continued to exceed labour supply until 1930, when in the context of regional famine and worldwide depression this trend began to alter.

The internal impact of migrant labour is assessed, as are Christianisation and the effects of colonial famine policy in 1929-30. In a southern African context, after twenty years of colonial rule Ovamboland remained marginal to the core capitalist economies. Colonial policy contributed to this isolation, and internally, matriliney slowed down processes of reorientation under the influence of capitalism. But gradual social transformations, which had their roots in the pre-colonial social order, continued under the influence of this limited capitalist penetration and increased environmental pressures.

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This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration. It has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for any qualification at any other university.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGCSSp	Archives Générales de la Congrégation du Saint Esprit (Paris)
AHM	Arquivo Histórico Militar (Lisbon)
AHU	Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (Lisbon)
AVEM	Archiv der Vereinigte Evangelische Mission (Wuppertal-Barmen)
BG	<i>Bulletin Général</i> (de la Congregation du Saint-Esprit)
<i>Bol AGC</i>	<i>Boletim da Agencia Geral das Colonias</i>
<i>BSGL</i>	<i>Boletim da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa</i>
FMS	Finnish Mission Society
GSWA	German South West Africa
ICS	Institute of Commonwealth Studies (London)
IDAF	International Defence and Aid Fund
<i>JAH</i>	<i>Journal of African History</i>
<i>JSAS</i>	<i>Journal of Southern African Studies</i>
OC	Officer in Charge
OEF	Ovamboland Expeditionary Force
OMEG	Otavi Minen- und Eisenbahngesellschaft
<i>OMQP</i>	<i>Ovamboland Mission Quarterly Paper of Thanksgiving and Intercession</i>
PLAN	People's Liberation Army of Namibia
NAN	National Archives of Namibia (Windhoek)
NA	Native Affairs
NC	Native Commissioner
n.d.	no date (on letter)
RC	Resident Commissioner
RMG	Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft

<i>SALB</i>	<i>South African Labour Bulletin</i>
SWA	South West Africa
SWANLA	South West Africa Native Labour Association
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
SWATF	South West Africa Territorial Force
TRP	Très Reverend Père (Spiritian correspondence)
UG	Union Government
UN	United Nations

GLOSSARY

<i>aguardente</i>	Generic term for brandies and other distilled spirits.
<i>Bericht</i>	Report.
<i>chefe</i>	Commander of local Portuguese fort or station.
<i>embala</i>	Royal residence.
<i>ondjala</i>	Hunger; famine.
<i>efundula</i>	Female initiation rite (also <i>ohango</i>).
<i>ekomba</i>	Broom.
<i>elenga</i>	Headman; councillor (pl. <i>omalenga</i>).
<i>etanga</i>	Fighting unit of approximately one hundred men.
<i>ethanda</i>	Male circumcision.
<i>eumbo</i>	Homestead; household.
<i>Kalunga</i>	God.
<i>mestiço</i>	Of mixed race.
<i>Nordbezirk</i>	Northern district.
<i>odalate</i>	Metal identification disk; labour contract.
<i>okapuka</i>	Insect.
<i>okasava</i>	Prestation or tribute from households to king.
<i>omahangu</i>	Millet.
<i>ompampa</i>	Sacred burial place of king.
<i>omwene keumbo</i>	Head of household.
<i>oshana</i>	Water channel for floodwaters.
<i>oshifima</i>	Millet porridge; staple food in Ovamboland.
<i>oshilongo</i>	Nation; country.
<i>ovakristi</i>	Christians.

<i>Ovambofrage</i>	The Ovambo question.
<i>Ovambogefahr</i>	The Ovambo danger.
<i>Ovambopolitik</i>	Policy towards the Ovambo during German rule.
<i>pandulo</i>	'Gift' or prestation presented to kings and headmen by returning migrant workers.
<i>relatório</i>	Report.
<i>Schutzgebiet</i>	Protectorate.
<i>sertanejo</i>	One who lives in the far interior; backwoods trader.
<i>serviçal</i>	Indentured worker; euphemism for forced labour in Angola (pl. <i>serviçaes</i>).
<i>shongola</i>	Whip; sjambok.
<i>soba</i>	Chief, headman or king in Angola.
<i>tatekulu</i>	Grandfather; respectful term for elderly man.
<i>veldkos</i>	Wild foods gathered from forests.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Namibian historiography

When Namibia became independent on 21 March 1990, her small, diverse population had experienced two sets of colonial rulers, German and South African. From an historian's point of view, these layers make for unique richness and complexity. But as Brigitte Lau has noted:

the enormous amount of local and international creativity and debate that have characterized the field of African history ever since decolonization in the early 1960s have never been spent in or on Namibia.¹

Her statement refers to pre-colonial historiography, but until recently much the same could be argued for colonial and now post-colonial eras. The reasons for Namibia's marginalization within African historiography include the isolated international position of the country and past attempts to discourage research by the South African colonial administration. The primary response to these factors shows in the greater volume of legal and political texts about Namibia's recent situation, rather than a solid body of historical research. Further obstacles are posed by the geographically scattered and linguistically diverse nature of primary historical sources on Namibia.²

This is not to imply that there has been no struggle to break Namibia's isolation from the broad stream of African historiography. On the contrary,

¹ Brigitte Lau, "Pre-colonial" Namibian historiography: what is to be done?', in Brian Wood (ed.), *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's history and society* (London, 1988), p 94.

² Christopher Saunders, 'Towards the decolonisation of Namibian history: notes on some recent work in English', in Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, p 81.

this effort has an honourable history, originating with German scholars and now increasingly shaped by Namibians. While outlining the growth in Namibian historiography however, this introduction recognises that we are still facing a legacy of under-research.

Historiography in central and southern Africa has tended to evolve through two stages,³ which have been echoed to a degree in the Namibian case. The first stage typically produced 'confrontationist' literature, pitching what has been variously termed anti-colonialist, 'Africanist'⁴ or nationalist⁵ interpretations against colonialist approaches. The need 'to clear away the distorting concepts of colonisation'⁶ was prioritised mainly in political history.

Namibia too has its colonialist literature, characterised by a 'feverish concentration on white settlers or Europeans as groups or individuals'.⁷ Lau argues that this has resulted in a settler history of limited range and quality.⁸ The literature which has addressed African societies depicts them as racked by internecine strife, benefitting from the arrival of colonial rule.⁹

³ Terence Ranger, 'Trends in African historiography and the tasks facing scholars of Namibia', in Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, p 42. Ranger's 'two-stage' theory is based largely on the experience of Zimbabwean historiography, and it would be a vast oversimplification to include South African historiography in this generalisation. For the complex layers in the development of a radical South African historical agenda, see Belinda Bozzoli and Peter Delius, 'Radical History and South African Society', *Radical History Review* 46/7, 1990, pp 13-45.

⁴ Lau, 'Pre-colonial Namibian historiography', p 94.

⁵ The term 'revisionist' has also been employed, notably in Tore Linné Eriksen with Richard Moorsom, *The Political Economy of Namibia. An annotated, critical bibliography* (Uddevalla, 1985), pp 67 and 91. These authors use 'revision' as an umbrella to cover both that literature undermining colonial interpretations, and the later more complex socio-economic historiographical agendas.

⁶ Ranger, 'Trends', p 42.

⁷ Lau, "'Pre-colonial" Namibian historiography', p 93.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Examples of contemporary writings are Theodor Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (Berlin, 1906); Theodor Seitz, *Vom Aufstieg und Niederbruch deutscher Kolonialmacht, Band 3: Die Gouverneursjahre in Südwestafrika* (Karlsruhe, 1929); Paul Rohrbach, *Deutsche Kolonialwirtschaft. I Band: Südwest-Afrika* (Berlin-Schöneberg, 1907); and Oskar Hintrager, *Südwestafrika in der deutschen Zeit* (München, 1955). See the comprehensive bibliographical survey by Eriksen with Moorsom, *Political Economy of Namibia*, pp 85-106.

Affirmations of the stability and progress brought by the Germans found its apotheosis in the work of Heinrich Vedder.¹⁰

One of the first works to confront these perceptions was Horst Drechsler's *Let Us Die Fighting*, which catalogued German colonial destruction of Herero and Nama communities and their resistance to the assaults.¹¹ Helmut Bley provided a rigorous overview of German rule, but was additionally concerned to analyse the imperial dynamic in relation to German politics of the time.¹² Work in a broadly similar genre for Portuguese colonialism in Angola and northern Namibia emerged in French in the 1970s. René Pélissier surveyed a large body of Portuguese material, primary and secondary, to produce what is predominantly a military history.¹³ Though he treats African societies largely in these terms, Pélissier usefully exposes and demystifies colonialist history of northern Namibia with his account of Portugal's worst military disaster in Africa, inflicted by a small Ovambo subgroup, the Mbandja, in 1904.¹⁴

Contributions to nationalist historiography in the 1980s included Peter Katjavivi's substantial study of nation-wide resistance.¹⁵ Neville Alexander's essay on southern resistance fleshes out a neglected area.¹⁶

¹⁰ Heinrich Vedder, *South West Africa in early times* (London, 1938). See Lau's useful critique of Vedder, "'Thank God the Germans Came': Vedder and Namibian Historiography', in Keith Gottschalk and Christopher Saunders (eds.), *African Seminar Collected Papers*, 2, 1981, pp 24-53.

¹¹ Horst Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting* (London, 1980).

¹² Helmut Bley, *South West Africa under German rule* (London, 1971).

¹³ René Pélissier, *Les Guerres Grises. Résistance et Révoltes en Angola (1845-1941)* (Orgeval, 1977); idem, 'Campagnes militaires au Sud-Angola (1885-1915)' *Cahiers d'Études Africains*, Vol 9, 1969, pp 54-111; idem, 'Mandume (c. 1890-1917) et la résistance Ovambo au colonialisme portugais en Angola', in Charles-André Julien (ed.), *Les Africains*, Vol VIII (Paris, 1977), pp 205-35.

¹⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 451-4.

¹⁵ Peter H. Katjavivi, 'The Rise of Nationalism in Namibia and its International Dimensions' (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1984); idem, *A history of resistance in Namibia* (London, 1988).

¹⁶ Neville Alexander, 'Three essays on Namibian history' in Kenneth Abrahams (ed.) *Namibia Review Publications*, No 1, June 1983, pp 3-34.

The preoccupation with the 'poisoned wells'¹⁷ of colonialist interpretations was a necessary phase in historiography. Generally, nationalist historiography in Africa began to generate criticism and self-criticism. The selective extraction of perceived instances of proto-nationalist or nationalist resistance, neglect of the wide range of responses employed by African societies to colonial intrusion, the simplistic treatment of 'heroic' anti-colonial leaders who were dominant agents within their own societies - all showed a need to move beyond straightforward resistance history. Thus a second stage in African historiography was broached, seeking to analyse the internal contradictions and complexities of societies. Namibian historiography in due course also integrated these approaches. Among the path-breaking new work was that of Brigitte Lau,¹⁸ Alvin Kienetz¹⁹ and Wolfgang Werner.²⁰ Werner more recently built very substantially on these foundations with his thesis on Herero self-peasantisation.²¹ These researchers concentrated on central and southern Namibia. In the post-resistance historiography of the north, to which the remainder of this discussion will be confined, Richard Moorsom²² and Gervase Clarence-Smith²³ broke new ground in the 1970s.

¹⁷ Ranger, 'Trends in African historiography', p 41.

¹⁸ Brigitte Lau, 'The emergence of Kommando politics in Namaland, Southern Namibia 1800-1870' (MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1982); idem, 'The Kommando in Southern Namibia 1800-1870', in Christopher Saunders (ed.), *Perspectives on Namibia: Past and Present* (University of Cape Town, Occasional Papers No 4/1983), pp 25-44; idem, 'Conflict and Power in Nineteenth-Century Namibia', *JAH*, 27 (1986), pp 29-39; idem, *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* (Windhoek, 1987).

¹⁹ Alvin Kienetz, 'The key role of the Orlam migrations in the early Europeanization of South West Africa (Namibia)', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 10, No 4, 1977, pp 553-72.

²⁰ Wolfgang Werner, 'An exploratory investigation into the mode of production of the Herero in pre-colonial Namibia to ca. 1870' (BSocSc Honours Dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1980); idem, 'Struggles in the Namibian countryside, 1915-50: some preliminary notes', in Brian Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, pp 268-80.

²¹ Wolfgang Werner, 'An Economic and Social History of the Herero of Namibia, 1915-1946' (D Phil thesis, University of Cape Town, 1989); idem, "'Playing Soldiers": The Truppenspieler Movement Among the Herero of Namibia, 1915 to ca. 1945', *JSAS*, Vol 16, No 3, 1990, pp 476-502.

²² Richard Moorsom's work has appeared in various published and unpublished forms. These are fully listed here; where articles represent earlier or abridged versions of others, this is indicated. Richard Moorsom, 'Colonisation and

The joint article by Clarence-Smith and Moorsom on underdevelopment and class formation,²⁴ despite ensuing general critiques of underdevelopment theory,²⁵ remains germinal for northern Namibian historiography. The strength of Moorsom's work on the development of labour migration²⁶ is that it traces the peculiar origins of class in Namibia to pre-colonial social formations and their frozen and silenced histories. Theoretically, Moorsom's work is informed by a structuralist position, framed in terms of the debate on articulation of modes of production. These theoretical positions have undergone considerable critique since the time of Moorsom's writing, particularly by social historians. The latter have argued that class formation cannot be understood without reference to divisions produced, not only by factors such as timing of proletarianization, but also by inherited and imported cleavages of race, religion and other cultural forms, chiefly authority, region, ethnicity, age, community form and gender, which

proletarianisation: an exploratory investigation of the formation of the working class in Namibia under German and South African rule to 1945' (MA thesis, University of Sussex, 1973); idem, 'Underdevelopment, contract labour and worker consciousness in Namibia 1915-72', *JSAS*, 4, No 1, 1977, pp 53-87; idem, 'Migrant workers and the formation of SWANLA, 1900-1926', *SALB*, Vol 4, Nos 1 and 2, Jan-Feb, 1978, pp 107-115; idem, 'Underdevelopment and class formation: the birth of the contract labour system in Namibia', (Collected Papers 5, Centre for Southern African Studies, University of York, 1980). The latter is an abridged version of Moorsom, 'The Formation of the Contract Labour System in Namibia, 1900-1926', in Abebe Zegeye and Shubi Ishemo (eds.), *Forced Labour and Migration. Patterns of Movement within Africa* (London, 1989), pp 55-108.

²³ Gervase Clarence-Smith, 'Drought in Southern Angola and Northern Namibia, 1837-1945' (unpublished paper, SOAS/ICS, University of London, 1974); idem, 'Mossamedes and its hinterland, 1875-1915', (PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1975); idem, *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists in Southern Angola* (Cambridge, 1979); idem, *The third Portuguese empire 1825-1975* (Manchester, 1985); 'The Angolan connection in Namibian history', in Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, pp 171-174; idem, 'Capital accumulation and class formation in Angola, c. 1875-1961', in David Birmingham and Phyllis Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa Vol 2* (London, 1983), pp 163-99.

²⁴ Gervase Clarence-Smith and Richard Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation in Ovamboland, 1844-1917', in Robin Palmer and Neil Parsons (eds.), *The Roots of Rural Poverty in Central and Southern Africa* (London, 1977), pp 96-112.

²⁵ See for example Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist theory* (London, 1977), pp 15-50; also Ken Smith, *The Changing Past - trends in South African Historical Writing* (Johannesburg, 1988), pp 169-70.

²⁶ Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment, Contract Labour'; idem, *Underdevelopment and class formation*.

are in turn refashioned by diverse initiatives on the ground.²⁷ These arguments, while valid in reminding us of the range of questions left out of studies on Ovamboland so far, do not detract from the basic accuracy of Moorsom's analysis as it stands.

Labour history has been fleshed out further by Robert Gordon,²⁸ Keith Gottschalk,²⁹ Zhu Mbako³⁰ as well as German language research,³¹ but it remains an area requiring a great deal more rigorous research.

Historiography of northern societies widened in the late 1980s with the publication of research based on the archives of the Finnish Mission Society (FMS). This source dates back to 1870. Its richness is brought to light in Harri Siiskonen's³² study of pre-colonial long-distance trade, which has a strong empirical emphasis. Immense local detail is made accessible to non-Finnish speakers this way, but the analytical potential is under-explored. Frieda-Nela Williams argues that this study stops short of locating Ovamboland within the wider context of regional economies,³³ all increasingly affected by merchant capital, which was itself undergoing transformation. Finnish sources were utilised together with imperial German material in Martti Eirola's unpublished dissertation on the relationship between the German

²⁷ Bozzoli and Delius, 'Radical History', p 31.

²⁸ Robert Gordon, 'A Note on the History of Labour Action in Namibia', *SALB*, Vol 1 No 10, April 1975, pp 7-17; idem, *Mines, Masters and Migrants. Life in a Namibian Mine Compound* (Johannesburg, 1977); idem, 'Some organisational aspects of labour protest amongst contract workers in Namibia', *SALB*, Vol 4, Nos 1 and 2, Jan-Feb 1978, pp 116-123; idem, 'Variations in Migration Rates: The Ovambo Case', *Journal of Southern African Affairs*, Vol 3, No 3, July 1978, pp 261-94.

²⁹ Keith Gottschalk, 'South African Labour Policy in Namibia 1915-1975', *SALB*, Vol 4, Nos 1 and 2, Jan-Feb 1978, pp 75-106.

³⁰ Simon Zhu Mbako, 'The development of labour and political resistance in Namibia: 1890-1972' (MA thesis, University of Sussex, 1986).

³¹ See inter alia Fritz Wege, 'Die Anfänge der Herausbildung einer Arbeiterklasse in Südwestafrika unter der deutschen Kolonialherrschaft', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 1, 1969, pp 183-221; idem, 'Zur Sozialen Lage der Arbeiter Namibias unter der Deutschen Kolonialherrschaft in den Jahren vor dem ersten Weltkrieg', *Jahrbuch für Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, 3, 1971, pp 201-18.

³² Harri Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change in Ovamboland, 1850-1906* (Helsinki, 1990).

³³ Frieda-Nela Williams, *Precolonial Communities of Southwestern Africa* (Windhoek, 1991), p 29.

colonial state and Ovambo polities prior to 1915.³⁴ This addresses a large gap in northern historiography.

Given the wealth of Finnish sources, an important historiographical priority is the role of mission organisations in the north. Whereas mission organisations elsewhere in Namibia have come under useful scrutiny,³⁵ an unproblematic picture of FMS tension with colonial government and of progressive work amongst the Ovambo has been allowed to persist in published work.³⁶ Much evidence indeed confirms that FMS interests regularly differed from those of the colonial state. But the more crucial areas of enquiry are the complexities of this colonial relationship, and mission conflicts at different times with rulers, *élites* and subordinate groups (both Christian and non-Christian) in Ovambo polities.

One aspect of the Finnish sources, their ethnography of the Ovambo, is critically reviewed in Williams'³⁷ own work, which as Lau puts it, 'breaks new ground all round'.³⁸ No other research has attempted to chart the origins of the Ovambo, nor locate Ovamboland so integrally in central African history. Of northern background herself, with a long career of combined political activism and research, Williams is concerned to address the Finnish missionary ethos and European ethnocentrism, which she 'balances' with

³⁴ Martti Eirola, 'The reservation of Ovamboland in the making. Political responses to colonialism in the north of German South West Africa during the Great Uprisings of 1904-1907' (unpublished dissertation, University of Oulu, 1988); see also idem, 'The Ukuambi Incident and its Aftermath: A Study of the Ovambo Resistance Against the German Colonial Power', in Harri Siiskonen (ed.), *Studying the Northern Namibian Past: Research Seminar in Tloirminne, 2-4 December 1985* (Joensuu, 1986), pp 66-90; idem, "'Ovamboland" and the German colonial power: an account of the political responses to colonialism in the Cuvelai Flood Plain, 1885-1915' (PhD thesis, University of Oulu, forthcoming).

³⁵ See especially Heinrich Loth, *Die Christliche Mission in Südwestafrika. Zur destruktiven Rolle der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft beim Prozess der Staatsbildung in Südwestafrika* (Berlin, 1963); Lau, "'Thank God the Germans came'", p 16.

³⁶ Such background studies would have benefitted Enquist, whose theological critique of the Rhenish Mission Society in central Namibia went far to explain the nature of their ideological intervention, a strength he could not sustain in his depiction of FMS work in the north. See R.J. Enquist, *Namibia: Land of Tears, Land of Promise* (Selinsgrove, 1990), pp 57-58.

³⁷ Frieda-Nela Williams, *Precolonial Communities*.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, Editor's Foreword.

Ovambo oral sources. But in some senses the nationalist critiques apply to Williams' work as well, for by replacing Eurocentrism with a perspective based on oral traditions, an alternative emerges which is heavily influenced by the ideological constructs and interests of Ovambo ruling groups.³⁹ It remains predominantly a study of kingdoms and *élites*, though it lays a foundation for posing further questions about how they derived their power.

One case study of an Ovambo kingdom critically examines the putative resistance hero, Ipumbu ya Tshilongo.⁴⁰ Wolfram Hartmann's thesis argues that internal violence was increasingly employed by this king to shore up his royal resistance to colonial rule. Hartmann might have reached different conclusions regarding the latter had the time-scale of his research framework been longer, but the questions he raises, especially on gender relations, are vital. Broader societal dimensions to gender relations in Ovamboland are explored more fully in Gwyneth Davies' anthropological study of *efundula*.⁴¹

Attempts have been made in this thesis to take forward many of the issues raised so far in this historiographical discussion. Vast areas of northern history remain completely unresearched, not least its colonial history. Several decades prior to colonial occupation are explored, partly to engage with existing historiographical debate on the period prior to occupation, but also as a basis for understanding social changes that occurred under colonial rule. This study's goals are necessarily limited in view of the vast silences which exist: these could not possibly be addressed in a single thesis.

An attempt is made to examine the 'internal dynamic', through a study of production, the organisation of labour, differentiation according to class,

³⁹ For a critical appreciation of oral tradition, see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (London, 1985).

⁴⁰ Wolfram Hartmann, 'Rural struggles in Namibia, 1915-1946; with special reference to Ipumbu ya Shilongo' (MA dissertation, Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, 1989).

⁴¹ Gwyneth Davies, 'The Efundula: Fertility and Social Maturity among the Kuanyama of Southern Angola' (MA thesis, University of Kent, 1987). See also Caroline Allison, 'The subordination of Namibian women: historical evolution, recent trends and possible future directions' (PhD thesis, University of Sussex, 1987).

age and gender, and the ideological mechanisms of control by dominant groups. Whatever the broad approach outlined above, however, the arguments formulated have depended on material available. In the analysis of differentiation, for example, an effort has been made to give equal conceptual weight to class, age and gender, although this is greatly at variance with the empirical weight of material on each. The *interaction* of internal processes and external forces is a necessary focus for approaching these issues. A suggestive model for such an interactive methodological approach appears in William Beinart's study of Cape workers in the diamond mines of 'Jamani'.⁴²

The historical fulcrum of the period researched⁴³ is the occupation of Ovamboland by South Africa and Portugal in 1915, which saw primary African resistance and divisions within this resistance. Analysis of external agency in the colonial period, particularly the character of the state and relations between the state and different forms of capitalism, has benefited from Tony Emmett's wide-ranging thesis on nationalism.⁴⁴ My own study, however, confines discussion of relations between state and capital almost exclusively to how these affected developments in Ovamboland.

New research inevitably reveals new gaps. This is particularly so in view of the fact that a historiography relating to ecological and demographic changes, prevalent elsewhere in Africa since the mid-1970s, has barely touched Namibia. Emmett argues that a weakness in the work of Clarence-Smith and Moorsom is their failure to present a fuller interaction between ecology and migration.⁴⁵ This thesis does touch on famine issues, but much wider demographic and ecological studies - not to mention epidemiological⁴⁶

⁴² William Beinart, "'Jamani'. Cape Workers in German South-West Africa, 1904-12', in William Beinart and Colin Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in Rural South Africa* (London, 1987), pp 166-190.

⁴³ See Chapter 5.

⁴⁴ Anthony Brian Emmett, 'The rise of African Nationalism in South West Africa/Namibia, 1915-1966' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 306-7, Endnote 7.

⁴⁶ Gwyneth Davies' current doctoral research at the University of Kent addresses this gap with a medical anthropological study of the Kwanyama in the 1930s.

- would be necessary to unfreeze these rich and complex dimensions of Namibian history.

Ovamboland in African historiography

So far remarks have been confined to Namibian historiography. In the context of African historiography, the case of Ovamboland offers fresh perspectives on well-established themes. Though there are echoes of African experiences elsewhere, it is the peculiarities that are most interesting.

Ovamboland has an extraordinary environment which sustains relatively large concentrations of settled people, while its variegated resources allow mixed farming. Agricultural practices partly dictated what type of response the Ovambo made to mercantilism; with no markets for millet, commoditisation took the form of cattle-trade and migrant labour. In this environment, droughts and floods were frequent though localised. Exchange between polities usually softened the impact of scarcity. There has always been a degree of self-containment in the region, though over time its fragility has become accentuated.

Secondly, Ovamboland is remarkably isolated. This reinforced the slowness of change induced by external factors, whereas other African states experienced earlier and greater disruption, especially when close to white settlement. For any reasonable comparisons, it is necessary to look to the marginal societies such as the Venda or Mpondo, or better still tropical Africa. From the viewpoint of local colonial administration after 1915, this remoteness facilitated control; the region was effectively sealed off from outsiders. The terms on which Ovamboland was integrated into the wider economy were strictly limited to migrant labour.

A third singularity of Ovamboland is the lateness with which it was incorporated into mercantile and capitalist economies. Ovambo resistance to colonial occupation, later than many other central and southern African rebellions, faced a more advanced technology of suppression. This affected rebellions in southern Namibia as well. Similarly, the establishment of a colonial administration took special forms when its inception was in the 1920s rather than earlier.

The nature of the interaction between external influence and internal process in Ovamboland was also unusual. In Namibia, the same capital though a different labour market from the Rand axis operated: though it was 'at one remove', migrant labour tied the region to the southern African capitalist heartland. But Ovamboland was also located within the central African matrilineal belt. Capitalist relations tend to undermine matrilineal practices and reinforce inheritance patterns which allow fathers who have accumulated to pass on to their children, usually sons.⁴⁷ Pressure mounted in Ovamboland at least from the late 1940s to change matrilineal inheritance,⁴⁸ but few significant changes have as yet occurred.⁴⁹ Pressures appear to work very slowly.

These and many other factors give rise to a strong sense that, in the period under study in Ovamboland, things began to change, and then did not. There were incipient military states in pre-colonial Ovamboland, which abolished male circumcision and armed themselves, but stopped far short of regimentation. Internal slavery existed, but incorporative techniques were effective in submerging it at the inception of colonial rule. Four decades of migrant labour had by the 1930s produced the beginnings of a cash economy, but there was still virtually no bridewealth inflation. Similarly, environmental

⁴⁷ See Ladislav Holy, *Strategies and norms in a changing matrilineal society: descent, succession and inheritance among the Toka of Zambia* (Cambridge, 1986).

⁴⁸ Edwin Loeb, *In Feudal Africa*, published as an annex to the *International Journal of American Linguistics*, 28, 1962, p 110.

⁴⁹ Interview with Simeon Heita, Onawa, 19.2.1990.

pressure, colonial administration and the capitalist economy which promoted migrant labour were slow-acting in their reorientation of Ovamboland into a labour reserve.

Therefore, with this environment, isolation and late impact of external forces, the long view is necessary. This perspective facilitates an understanding of the resilience of deep-lying local structures, particularly lineage relations of production.

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six substantive chapters, broadly corresponding to periodization.

Chapter 2 outlines the socio-economic background and political structures of the Ovambo polities in the 1880s and touches on religious beliefs and healing systems. It attempts to delineate production and labour organisation in the context of the ecology of the floodplain. It is a foundation chapter which attempts to explain internal processes, including the mechanisms of ideological control by dominant groups, before examining the impact of external forces on these processes.

Chapter 3 covers the period up to 1900. Two regional epicentres of merchant capital impinged on Ovamboland from the mid-nineteenth century, from north and south. Increased militarisation and aggrandisement of senior headmen under kings were two internal developments, but more important was the accentuation of social cleavages, corresponding to the start of migrant labour and reinforced by rinderpest in 1897. The penetration of capitalist relations of exchange also created different interests among those mercantile, settler and colonial nuclei on the Ovambo periphery. The first colonial probings were made by Germany and Portugal.

In Chapter 4, which covers 1900 to 1915, political struggles are the predominant theme. There is a narrative overview of the encroachment by colonial powers, militarily by Portugal, diplomatically by Germany, assisted by the mission presence. Both high- and low-profile resistance by Ovambo leaders is mentioned, representing both military confrontation and political evasion and manipulation. The conquest of northern Ovambo, Ombandja, set the scene for the invasion of the largest Ovambo polity, Oukwanyama, in 1915. Destabilisation was exemplified in the careers of displaced local leaders who engaged in banditry or co-operation with colonisers. The internal focus is on Oukwanyama and is concerned with the growth of migrant labour and German attempts to systematise it. The endeavours of the Kwanyama king Mandume ya Ndemufayo to curtail the increasing power of *omalenga* (headmen) and on a separate front, the missions, are explored, as is his populist project as a whole. This leader also made a bid to promote Kwanyama hegemony in the region.

Chapter 5 is confined to 1915-17 and is the crux of the thesis, detailing the colonial occupation of the Ovambo floodplain. Military confrontations occurred between Germany and Portugal in the context of world war, providing the opportunity for Ovambo and neighbouring polities in southern Angola to throw back colonial frontiers. The ensuing Portuguese conquest of northern Ovamboland and Mandume's difficulties with South African 'protection' are discussed. The appalling famine of 1915-16, its death rate heightened by violence, revealed the strains on polities already under stress of social differentiation and threatened with fragmentation under conquest and border demarcation. The hiatus period up to 1917 explores the different levels of struggle between Mandume and headmen, not only for their constituencies but in the face of South African pressure to co-operate. The volatile situation ended with Mandume's death in battle against Union forces.

The tenacity of the ideological aspects of kingship is explored in a consideration of his alleged suicide in oral history.

Chapter 6 outlines the aims of colonial rule, under the different periods of martial law and post-1921 mandate. The levelling process of buttressing cooperative headmen and kings while pressurizing or removing recalcitrant leaders is detailed. Ipumbu offered a good example of the latter; he demonstrated the historical ambivalence of 'heroic' leaders, who resisted colonialism but also provoked conflicts within their own communities. Rivalries are explored between political leaders and lineage elders over the control of younger male labour, now incorporated into the capitalist economy through recurrent labour migration. Labour shortages and state efforts to overcome these are outlined. A sense of the cumulative impact of socio-economic change in the context of ecological and demographic pressures is highlighted by an examination of the effects of the final boundary demarcation in 1928 and the voluntary resettlement of large numbers of Kwanyama in the mandated territory from north of the new border.

Chapter 7 takes the thesis to the mid-1930s, showing the contradictions between colonial officials and missions, and the crystallization of a 'discourse' on indirect rule by the Native Commissioner, 'Cocky' Hahn. Ovambo responses and state measures during famine in 1929-31 show how famine survival was redefined under colonialism. Relations of production are examined, especially as they affected women drawn into famine relief work and more generally as wives of absentee husbands who became labour migrants, particularly in the context of Christianisation. The transition from shortage to surplus of migrant labour is traced, leading to the conclusion that in the context of the overall economy, the terms on which men migrated worsened just as deepening problems in agricultural subsistence added to the pressures on them to migrate.

Sources

The main body of archival material consulted is located in the National Archives of Namibia in Windhoek, for both the German and South African colonial periods. The Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino in Lisbon provided documentation on the Portuguese presence in southern Angola and Ovamboland, as did the city's separate military and diplomatic archives. These were supplemented by material in the Centro Nacional de Documentação e Investigação Histórico in Luanda, the Angolan national archive.

Much Angolan material on the post-1915 period, believed to be located in Lubango,⁵⁰ was not accessible at the time of research. Nor was oral research possible in 1989-90 in southern Angola. At the time the region was still affected by the dislocations of civil war and famine. In a sense this research has fallen victim to the historical problems of Angola. As a result, research on Ovamboland after 1915 was largely confined to the part which came under South African control, whose records are intact and accessible. Suggestions concerning southern Angolan history are drawn out where sources have indirectly allowed.

Governmental material housed in Windhoek, Lisbon and Luanda has been augmented by missionary records of the *Congrégation du Saint Esprit* in Paris, the *Vereinigte Evangelische Mission* in Wuppertal, Germany, the Finnish Mission Society available in German in Oniipa, Namibia, and the International Missionary Council housed in SOAS, London.

Oral research was conducted during fieldwork in Ovamboland during 1989-90. Over forty informants were interviewed; the most important texts are

⁵⁰ Gervase Clarence-Smith, SOAS, personal communication; Arlindo Barbeitos, Luanda, personal communication.

transcribed and prefaced with contextual and critical remarks in a separate volume attached to this thesis.

Orthography and terminology

Ovamboland appears deceptively homogeneous from the outside, but its heterogeneity is considerable. Nowhere is this more apparent than in orthography. No common language exists for the entire region; instead, there is bipolar domination by oshiNdonga and oshiKwanyama. Most areas within the region therefore have at least two slightly different names. European mission influence has tended to dictate orthography of these languages, namely through Finnish, German and English. Lexicographic studies in oshiNdonga were decisively influenced by Finns; oshiKwanyama was by contrast influenced by the English language.

To achieve a coherent and understandable orthography which reflects usage, a compromise has been adopted. Throughout southern Ovambo and parts of the west, the Ndonga language rendered in Finnish-influenced orthography will be used. For example the oshiNdonga prefix *uu-* will be attached to place names, such as Uukwambi and Uukwaluudhi, which reflect southern Ovambo usage. The double-vowel stress employed in Finnish will be retained, partly to help pronunciation, as it is useful in pointing to syllabic stress in a language which unlike the Nguni group of Bantu languages, does not have a consistent penultimate stress.

Correspondingly, in areas of northern Ovamboland where oshiKwanyama is widely used, the relevant prefix will be used, for example *Oukwanyama*, and not *Uukwanyama* as in Ndonga usage. Kwanyama orthography will plainly reflect structures of the English language and avoid double-vowel groups.

Because most of the evidence for this thesis derives from sources centred on the Kwanyama polity, orthography of general terms will follow oshiKwanyama. For example, the plural prefix *ova-* will be preferred to the Ndonga prefix for the same noun group, as in *ovakristi* instead of *aakristi* (Christians). One exception to this will be the term used for the female initiation ceremony, which is called *efundula* in oshiKwanyama and *ohango* in oshiNdonga and oshiKwambi. The author hopes this compromise will reflect the usages a Kwanyama-based subject would be likely to hear, and that readers will bear with her firstly for the degree of Kwanyama hegemony, and secondly for the inability to be completely uniform.

Prefixes will be employed for language as in *oshi-Ndonga*, and for persons as in the term for headmen, *oma-lenga*. The roots of nouns, for example Kwanyama, will be employed as adjectives, but not allowed to stand on their own to depict persons or places. The generic title Ovambo is retained, but the region as a whole will be called Ovamboland, rather than the Ovambo name, *Owambo*. This reflects usage in the documentation consulted.

Where quotations are made from sources in foreign languages, these have been translated into English by the author. Where the meaning is uncertain or nuances better rendered in the original language, the latter will be footnoted to allow the reader to make his or her own judgment.

Abbreviations are kept to a minimum, but convenience dictates not only South West Africa (SWA) but persons in official positions such as the Native Commissioner (NC) be abbreviated. Outdated names will be used to reflect usage in colonial times in the main body of the thesis. Accordingly SWA appears more frequently than Namibia. Likewise, to refer to the South African colonial occupiers of 1915 as British, as the Ovambo and Portuguese did, is too confusing. They are therefore referred to as 'Union' officials.

Finally, pre-colonial societies on the Cuvelai floodplain did not refer to themselves or each other as Ovambo, but as Kwanyama, Mbalantu, Mbandja,

Kwambi, Ndonga, Ngandjera and so forth. The term Ovambo was applied by people outside the floodplain as a generic designation. This is the sense in which it is used throughout the thesis.

CHAPTER 2

OVAMBOLAND IN THE 1880s

The physical milieu

Ovamboland straddles the border between modern Namibia and Angola.¹ It constitutes a floodplain, fed by a maze of water channels called *oshanas* originating from the Cuvelai river. Ovamboland's northwestern reaches touch the western bend of the Kunene, the closest perennial river. Its southernmost reaches drain into the vast shallow pan of Etosha.² While Ovamboland appears geographically isolated, the hydrology of the floodplain implies a degree of ecological self-containment.

South of Etosha a thirst-belt of Kalahari thorn-scrub separates the floodplain from what in the 1880s was called Hereroland.³ To the west are the arid mountains and pastures of Kaoko, thinly populated by Himba pastoralists.⁴ Their Herero kin moved in transhumance over equally arid land west of the Chella escarpment in Angola.⁵ Small Nama offshoots of Jonker

¹ See maps, Appendix 1 and Appendix 2. The geographical boundaries of Ovamboland have shifted from pre-colonial to colonial times. In political geographic terms, its present situation is between the fourteenth and eighteenth degrees of longitude east, and between 17° 20' and 18° 40' of latitude south. Gerhard Töttemeyer, *Namibia Old and New. Traditional and Modern Leaders in Ovamboland* (London, 1978), p 2. An alternative source situates their overall habitation in the pre-colonial period between 16° and 20° latitude and 14° and 18° longitude. Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p ii.

² John H. Wellington, *South West Africa and Its Human Issues* (Oxford, 1967), p 19. See map, Appendix 2.

³ In the nineteenth century confusion existed between the terms Herero and Damara. See Dorian Haarhoff, *The Wild South-West. Frontier myths and metaphors in literature set in Namibia, 1760-1988* (Johannesburg, 1991), p 36.

⁴ AGCSSp, 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les Kaoko, ca 1880.

⁵ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 9; idem, 'Angolan connection', p 172; Duparquet, 'Voyages en Cimbébasie', *Les Missions Catholiques*, Vol XII, 1880, p 404; AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les Kaoko, ca 1880.

Afrikaner's great raiding parties of the 1860s and 1870s⁶ had also settled in Kaoko, the most famous of these being the Zwaartbooi,⁷ though later bands held together by Oorlog gained prominence in the area.⁸

In the north the floodplain gave way to the foothills and uplands of southern Angola, sustaining increasingly dense population clusters. Most were Nyaneke, divided into chieftaincies most notably those of Huila, Njau and Ngambwe.⁹ In the 1880s, the Huila plateau and central highlands of Angola also saw pockets of white settlement¹⁰ with Portuguese trading and administrative outposts and recently arrived Boer communities.¹¹ The water sources of the perennial rivers and southern floodplain originated from these highlands.¹²

East of the densely settled Ovambo area, the vast thornveld forests of Oshimpolo stretched hundreds of kilometres to the Kavango river. !Kung San groups, pushed progressively towards the margins of settled areas, subsisted increasingly in the Oshimpolo. Beyond the Oshimpolo the nearest Kavango settlements were those of the Kwangali, who had a close affinity with the Ovambo.¹³

⁶ E.C. Tabler (ed.), *Travels in the Interior of South Africa, 1849-63* (Cape Town, 1971) Part 1, pp 214, 236 and 239; Clarence Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 101; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 142-4, 146 and 158; Lau, 'Kommando in Southern Namibia 1800-1870', p 42.

⁷ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 107; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 146; Harri Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 142; NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901.

⁸ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, p 107; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 87-8; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 436.

⁹ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 9.

¹⁰ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 16; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 16; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 421-5. For the background to this settlement see Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 139-55.

¹¹ For an account of the Boer migrations across the Kalahari and their immigration into Portuguese territory, see NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, passim; AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les différentes tribus des rives du Cunene, ca 1880; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 44.

¹² Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 37.

¹³ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 32; interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 7.10.1989.

The Ovambo floodplain represented a sudden dense concentration of population in the semi-arid environment of the northern sandveld of south-western Africa. Though the floodplain has a shallow layer of relatively fertile alluvial soil,¹⁴ the soil everywhere in the hinterland of the southern Angolan coast was poor. The crucial factor dictating human settlement therefore was the availability of water.¹⁵ Ovambo communities were settled on the cleared areas of the floodplain near the *oshanas*, with fairly wide woodland belts separating the different polities.¹⁶ The larger polities were situated in the east, namely Oukwanyama and Ondonga, where the *oshanas* were most concentrated.¹⁷ Broadly speaking, medium-sized polities were situated in the centre of the overall population cluster, such as Evale, Ombandja, Uukwambi and Ongandjera. The smaller and relatively decentralised communities such as Uukwaluudhi, Ombalantu, Onkolonkadi, Eunda and Dombondola were located towards the west.¹⁸ Smaller groups were settled near the Kunene river, which was important for dry season watering of stock.¹⁹ The chiefships around Humbe represented larger centralised polities within the Nkhumbi cluster,²⁰ whose settlement scaled down to small groups such as the Kwankwa and Hinga who lived close to the verges of the Kunene.²¹

¹⁴ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 39; Wellington, *South West Africa*, p 67.

¹⁵ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 7-8.

¹⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 41.

¹⁷ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 37; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 43; Wellington, *South West Africa*, p 20.

¹⁸ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les différentes tribus des rives du Cunène, ca 1880.

¹⁹ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa to the Council of the League of Nations 1928*, p 4.

²⁰ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 96; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 10.

²¹ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les différentes tribus des rives du Cunène, ca 1880; see map, Appendix 2.

Climate and meteorology

Three sources of water sustained the dense population and crop cultivation in the floodplain region. First, average rainfall was approximately 550 mm, but with high variability.²² Eighty per cent usually occurred between November and April²³ and variations in rainfall distribution were common from north to south.²⁴ Partial droughts were frequent and widespread drought occasional.²⁵

A second source of water was the *efundja*. This floodwater flowed through the system of broad water channels, the *oshanas*. It had its origin in the Cuvelai river system in the Angolan highlands to the north²⁶ and consequently seeped most heavily into the northern areas of the floodplain.²⁷ If rains affecting the Angolan headwaters were plentiful, the *efundja* travelled as far as the Etosha pan,²⁸ and floodwaters remained in *oshanas* and reservoirs from January until June. Southern *oshanas* tended to dry out first. In poor

²² Märta Salokoski, Martti Eirola and Harri Siiskonen, 'The Ovambo Kingdoms on the eve of European domination', in Magnus Mörner and Thommy Svensson (eds.), *The Transformation of Rural Society in the Third World* (Stockholm, 1991), p 220. Note that widespread variation may occur within the Ovambo region in the same year. Accordingly, figures collected centrally for Ondonga do not reflect the rainfall situation in the whole of Ovamboland. See Table 3, Appendix 5.

²³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 39.

²⁴ Areas such as Evale received plentiful rain in April whereas southern areas such as Ondonga saw scarce rainfall at this time. Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 3-4. The beliefs around the great rain-making powers of Vale kings probably stemmed in part from its favoured climatic margin over southern polities. See Helao Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf. The autobiography of a Namibian freedom fighter* (London, 1990), p 1; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 46.

²⁵ Salokoski et al, 'Ovambo Kingdoms', p 220. See Clarence-Smith, 'Drought in Southern Angola', for a chronological treatment of regional droughts. P.D. Tyson, *Climatic Change and Variability in Southern Africa* (Oxford, 1986), p 68, counters arguments that progressive dessication has occurred in the last two hundred years.

²⁶ Wellington, *South West Africa*, pp 19-20; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 37; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 96. Early European travellers thought the source of the *efundja* feeding the *oshana* system to be the Kunene river. See Hugo Hahn, 'Neueste deutsche Forschungen in Süd-Afrika', *Petermann's Mitteilungen*, 1867, pp 295-6; AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les Omarambas, ca 1880.

²⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 39.

²⁸ Wellington, *South West Africa*, pp 19-20.

rainfall seasons in the Angolan headwater region, the *efundja* in Ovamboland was brief and transient, or did not reach the main floodplain at all.²⁹

The *efundja* was a life-bringer not only in terms of water. Fish,³⁰ frogs, water-fowl and game became plentiful, which, along with improved vegetation, replenished food sources during the lean months prior to the millet harvest. The silt carried down from the more fertile headwater region was deposited in the *oshana* floors once the *efundja* retreated. The *efundja*'s rapid seepage through Ovamboland transformed its semi-aridity and blinding whiteness into expanses of water and luxuriance.³¹

As rains dropped off and the water standing in *oshanas* from the *efundja* dried up, the Ovambo depended increasingly on their third source, groundwater. New wells were dug seasonally and old wells renovated. But the perennial problem affecting groundwater was the level of salinity.³² Brackishness was generally greater towards the south and Etosha.³³

Vegetation

In contrast to the woodland and dry forest characterising the Kalahari sandveld to the north,³⁴ Ovambo's unique hydrology supported mixed

²⁹ Hermann Tönjes, *Ovamboland. Land, Leute, Mission. Mit besondere Berücksichtigung seines grossten Stammes Oukuanjama* (Berlin, 1911), p 18; Georg Nitsche, *Ovamboland* (Kiel, 1913), p 47; P. Serton (ed.), *The Narrative and Journal of Gerald McKiernan in South West Africa* (Cape Town, 1954), pp 104-5.

³⁰ Hugo Hahn and Rath, 'Reise der Herren Hugo Hahn und Rath in südwestlichen Afrika, Mai bis September 1857', *Petermanns Mitteilungen*, 1859, p 296.

³¹ Accounts by travellers who reached Ovamboland during *efundja* become lyrical in their attempts to describe the sudden impact of greenery and water after the Thirstbelt. Francis Galton, *Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* (London, 1853), p 125; Duparquet, 'Voyages', p 406.

³² Wellington, *South West Africa*, p 91.

³³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 4; Siiskonen, 'The Environmental Impacts of Building and Energy Supply in Owambo since the 1850s' (unpublished paper, Third World Economic History and Development Group Conference, Manchester, 1991), p 4.

³⁴ Wellington, *South West Africa*, p 62.

woodland distant from *oshanas* and mopani close to the channels.³⁵

Woodlands thinned out towards the south, forming a dry broad steppe north and west of the Etosha pan, abounding with game in the 1880s.³⁶ Trees, especially baobab,³⁷ were more scattered in the drier west of Ovambo; a tremendous variety grew relatively densely in the centre and north, with stands of palm ubiquitous throughout the settled areas and on the paths between them.³⁸

Grasses, as elsewhere on the sandveld, were seasonal and sour, of little nutritive value. More nutritious perennial grasses were found on the floors of the *omuramba*.³⁹ Browsing was also important in the dry season.⁴⁰ Implicit in this was an acknowledgement that cattle did not thrive when forced to graze on only one ecological unit.⁴¹ In the Kunene region transhumance was vital, but in Ovamboland's interspersed ecological formations, only small displacements were necessary for cattle to find new pasture in good grazing condition. Ecologically therefore the Ovambo region was relatively self-contained, allowing for both cultivation and pastoralism reasonably close to settlements.⁴²

However, subtle ecological changes were quietly in train in the 1880s. The process of pushing back the population of wild browsing animals had begun, as game was more effectively hunted out with the arrival of firearms in the region. This affected the dry forest's cattle-carrying capacity, because of

³⁵ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 41.

³⁶ See NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, p 101.

³⁷ *Adansonia digitata*. See Wellington, *South West Africa*, p 62.

³⁸ *Hypheane ventricosa*. See Robert J. Rodin, *The Ethnobotany of the Kwanyama Ovambos* (Missouri, 1985), for a detailed botanical study. Wellington, *South West Africa*, p 62.

³⁹ See Eduardo Cruz de Carvalho and Jorge Vieira da Silva, 'The Cunene Region: Ecological Analysis of an African Agropastoral System', in Franz-Wilhelm Heimer (ed.), *Social Change in Angola* (Munich, 1973), pp 145-91, for a detailed description of the ecological grazing zones of the Kunene region and analysis of the pastoral systems.

⁴⁰ Carvalho and Silva, 'Cunene Region', p 149.

⁴¹ Alvin Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement and Subsistence in South-West Angola* (Washington, 1963), p 107.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p 159.

the spread of thorn bush. Indications of deforestation in Ondonga, to reach appalling severity a century later,⁴³ were already noticeable.⁴⁴

Demography and disease

It is very hard to establish the demography of Ovamboland in the 1880s on the basis of written sources available. There is a fairly wide discrepancy in figures estimated for the end of the nineteenth century, as the following table shows.⁴⁵

Table 1. Population in Ovamboland ca 1850-1900

Polity	Population in thousands					
	1850	1860	1879	1885	1896	1901
Kwanyama	120	8	60	20	150	45
Ondonga		8	15	20		20-22
Uukwambi			10	15		15
Ongandjera			10	10		7
Uukwaluudhi			6	8		7
Ombalantu						
Ombandja			15	20		35
Evale			2.5			
Kafima			1.5			
Ehanda				5		
Onkolonkadi						
Eshinga						
Ondombondola						
Onkwankwa						
Ondongwena						
[Nkhumbi]	50					
TOTAL		50	120	98		129

⁴³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 11; Siiskonen, 'Environmental Impacts', p 11.

⁴⁴ Siiskonen, 'Environmental Impacts', p 13; Charles John Andersson, *The Okavango River* (London, 1861), p 160; Haarhoff, *Wild South-West*, p 46.

⁴⁵ The table is compiled as follows: for 1850, from B. Brochado, 'Descrição das terras do Humbe, Camba, Mulondo, Quanhama e outras, contendo uma idéa da sua população, seus costumes, vestuários, etc.', *Annaes do Conselho Ultramarino, Parte não-official, Serie 1*, 1855, 187-97, 203-8; for the 1860s, Een, quoted in Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 42; for 1879, Charles Duparquet, *Viagens na Cimbebasia* (Luanda, 1953), p 99; for 1885, Hans Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika. Forschungsreisen durch die deutschen Schutzgebiet Gross-Nama- und Hereroland, nach dem Kunene, dem Ngami-See und der Kalahari. 1884-1887* (Oldenburg, 1891), p 273; for 1896, AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, No Vermelho 9, Chefe do Humbe - ?, 5.1.1896; for 1901, NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901, on information supplied by the Finnish missionary Rautanen.

There is some accord between figures given by missionaries, both Finnish and French. But other sources have tended to converge on a figure at least 50 per cent higher. The Portuguese figure for the Kwanyama population at 150,000 suggests a total population of over 200,000. The lower cluster of estimates is probably too low, and the higher estimate for 1896 must be exaggerated, unless there was a high rate of population growth. The Kwanyama were clearing the northern forest area for settlement⁴⁶ and spaces between settlements were diminishing, as Siiskonen shows.⁴⁷ But whether this physical expansion argues pure demographic growth is debatable, for settlement expansion represented a complex intersection of politics and pressures on environmental resources. Probably the most accurate total estimate would be close to that of Duparquet for 1879 at 120,000, although this may be a little high.

Regarding disease, remarks for the 1880s must remain very general and confined to two illnesses: malaria and syphilis. Ovamboland was represented by outsiders as chronically unhealthy during the rainy season, due to standing water left by the *efundja*. The trader Andersson died after a severe bout of black water fever, in a wilderness zone between Ovamboland and the Kunene.⁴⁸ Nama commandos which invaded Ovamboland in the 1860s were forced to retreat due to malaria. Other Africans entering the flood plain from the drier south were similarly affected.⁴⁹ In 1880 many Ovambo and also two Finnish missionaries died of malaria. This discouraged the Spiritan mission from proceeding with its plans to establish a station that year. The Finnish mission itself withdrew its members from three outlying stations to concentrate on one mission, where assistance would be available to

⁴⁶ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

⁴⁷ In 1866 the forested distance between Ondonga and Oukwanyama was estimated to be approximately sixty kilometres, and half a century later forty kilometres. Siiskonen, 'Environmental Impacts', p 13; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 43.

⁴⁸ NAN A 83, C.J. Andersson papers, Diary of Travel to Ovamboland, January - June 1867; AGCSSp 465-III, Renseignements sur l'Ovampo et le Kaoko, ca 1879.

⁴⁹ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, letters from Omaruru, 29.3.1880.

the sick. The year 1880 saw an exceptional *efundja* and, by implication, much malaria. But when the mission hospital at Onandjokwe opened in 1901, it reported epidemic malaria every year with the onset of rains and *efundja*.⁵⁰

The extent and aetiology of other diseases is hard to establish. Syphilis is a good example. Travellers described it as recently introduced and venereally transmitted. James Chapman asserted that while the Hottentots [sic] should be blamed for introducing venereal diseases among the Damara [Herero], where the infection rate became alarming due to their 'loose habits',⁵¹ the Ovambo by contrast were safeguarded by their rigorous sexual morality. The main evidence of this morality, argued Chapman, was their severe punishment of adultery.⁵² But Chapman's disapproval of Nama 'immorality', influenced by the religious ethos of his own background, leads him to project blame on to them for venereal disease, feeding an already negative racial view of the Nama and a correspondingly 'healthy' view of the Ovambo. His son William Chapman painted a different picture of the incidence of syphilis among the Kwanyama in 1893, basing his observations on acquaintance with the ruling section.

The Cuanhamas were fast becoming demoralised through contact with civilisation [,] and syphilis had made its inroad into the homes of many of the people [,] especially at the Chief's kraal and at those of the other members of the Royal family.⁵³

By implication, syphilis may have been introduced by Nama raiders or by trading parties from Angola or Walvis Bay; its alleged prevalence among the *élite* would suggest the latter origin. But again, very little dependence should be placed on these impressions: contemporary and later colonial medicine

⁵⁰ NAN DSO MO 5/1, Weindel, Annual Medical Report 1927. See also de Jager in Union of South Africa, *Report on the Conduct of the Ovakuanyama chief Mandume and on the Military Operations conducted against him in Ovamboland* (Cape Town, 1917), p 22.

⁵¹ Tabler (ed.), *Travels* Part 1, p 232.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Part 2, p 28.

⁵³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 2, p 120.

could not distinguish between venereal and (possibly indigenous) non-venereal syphilis, nor could it tell either disease from yaws.⁵⁴ Moreover, venereal diseases were even more inseparable from European notions of morality in the younger Chapman's generation. The latter's testimonial concerning syphilis is most revealing as his own metaphor for the corruption of the upper echelons of Kwanyama society, now deeply incorporated into mercantile networks.

Agricultural production and household labour

The crop best adapted to the unusual ecological conditions of the Ovambo floodplain was pearl millet.⁵⁵ For centuries, and probably since the early years of agricultural settlement, millet had been the staple grain, as in the Kavango riverine area. It was well adapted in that it was drought resistant and produced low but stable yields in the infertile sandy soils.⁵⁶

The household, centred on the homestead (*eumbo*), was the basic unit of production. Households did not cluster in village settlements but stood 'isolated in the middle of family fields.'⁵⁷ Polygyny was widespread but not universal.⁵⁸ Generally, a household consisted of its male head, his wife or wives and children, and married or unmarried sons. The head of household allocated fields among his wives according to seniority and married sons if resident. But he kept the best portion of household land for himself, which his wives then cultivated.⁵⁹ While common grain storage for household

⁵⁴ Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills. Colonial Power and African Illness* (Cambridge, 1991), pp 137-8.

⁵⁵ *Pennisetum typhoides*; local name is *omahangu*. Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 34.

⁵⁶ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 97.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 7.

⁵⁸ This was noted by the first Finnish missionaries in the 1870s. NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Kivinen - Secretary SWA, 8.3.1937.

⁵⁹ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 296; Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, pp 90-1.

consumption sometimes existed,⁶⁰ men kept separate granaries for longer-term needs such as purchase of cattle, for inheritance and in case of famine. Grain from the wives' granaries was consumed in the short-term, going towards the reproduction of the household.⁶¹ Women did not have direct access to land and depended on husbands or male kin for plots to cultivate. Evidence is unclear as to the proportion of women who owned cattle and the degree of differentiation among women on the basis of age. What is clear is that women from the royal clan enjoyed privileged access to many resources, including cattle.⁶²

Division of labour within the family was according to gender. Women were responsible for hoe agriculture and men for tending the livestock,⁶³ though men were not kept away entirely from cultivation.⁶⁴ They cleared land before cultivation and when female agricultural labour was scarce, they contributed towards hoeing.⁶⁵

The millet cultivation cycle followed weather patterns of a given year and dictated the timing of other economic activities.⁶⁶ Most often the fields were prepared for cultivation in the latter half of September, by heaping and burning any refuse left behind after cattle had browsed on the stalks of the previous crop.⁶⁷ Around early October the land was spread with manure from cattle enclosures attached to homesteads. Rains, which mostly commenced between the end of November and early December, signalled the beginning of the planting. After sowing, intensive hoeing was required to check weed growth, and during this period of heavy labour women rose at sunrise, at times summoning extra labour from neighbouring homesteads to complete

⁶⁰ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 45.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p 45.

⁶² AVEM c/k 22 No 3, Wulfhorst, Nekoto und Haischi in *Zwistigkeit*, ca 1910-33.

⁶³ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 97.

⁶⁴ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 45.

⁶⁵ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 296; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 52. Schinz points out that when this happened it was seen as degrading (*Erniedrigung*) for men.

⁶⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 50.

⁶⁷ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 295.

the task. The main harvesting took place between April and June.⁶⁸ Rainfall permitting, cultivators might attempt two or three crops in one season.⁶⁹

This system of hoe cultivation had labour-intensive features.⁷⁰ Slight ridges or mounds were dug for the millet crop to allow for drainage, though flooding tended to affect only those fields close to *oshanas* in years of heavy inundation. The gentle ridges planted with millet were often interspersed with beans,⁷¹ whose inter-cropping provided nutrients for the soil. Other vegetables were also cultivated on the peripheries or amongst the millet crop. These included pumpkins, warty gourds, melons and water melons.⁷²

The other grain crop of significance was sorghum, favoured as a royal food as well as beer-brewing.⁷³ Sorghum generally supplemented the staple food supply, and was planted more extensively with good early rains. Maize, it has been suggested, filtered down from the Angolan highlands and was grown very marginally in good years.⁷⁴ Maize was only one of a variety of cultivars which depended on higher rainfall and tended to be grown in a swathe across southern Angola, other crops being peanuts, manioc and sweet potato. The southernmost points of this agricultural swathe in the 1880s were the inter-riverine communities between the Kunene and the Kavango, but among the Ovambo groups this only included the northernmost and better-

⁶⁸ Ibid., p 296.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p 295.

⁷⁰ Salokoski, Eirola and Siiskonen, 'Ovambo Kingdoms', p 221.

⁷¹ *Vigna unguiculata* was the most common (*omakunde* in oshiKwanyama), followed by groundnuts (*efukwa*) of the *Voandzeia subterranea* variety. Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 34; Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, pp 294-5.

⁷² Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 34. Pumpkin, known locally as *enyangwa*, was the *Cucurbita moschata*; warty gourd (*oshitila*) was the *Lagenaria siceraria* variety; two varieties of melons (*okatanga kamufifi* and *etanga*) were *Kedrostris hirtella* and *Cucumis africanus* respectively; watermelon (*domeliua*) was the *Citrullus latanus* variety. See also Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 53.

⁷³ *Sorghum caffrorum*, local name is *olulyavala*. In fact both the red and white grain varieties were cultivated. Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 294; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 97.

⁷⁴ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 97.

watered Okafima and Evale.⁷⁵ Tobacco was cultivated particularly by the groups closest to the Kunene river, notably the Mbandja and Vale.⁷⁶ This formed an item of their trade with southern neighbours.⁷⁷

In addition to cultivation, Ovambo women and young girls spent much time gathering food for the homestead.⁷⁸ An important vegetable growing in cultivated fields in the rainy season was wild spinach, eaten as a main relish with millet porridge.⁷⁹ Other greens included the leaves of bean plants. Surplus wild greens were boiled, pressed into flat cakes (*omavanda*), sun-dried and stored so as to be soaked and reboiled later in the dry season.⁸⁰ A wide variety of wild bulbs, tubers and corms were collected, especially in the forested areas between dense settlements. Much local knowledge about *veldkos* was probably derived from long interaction with San groups, who still lived on the fringes of Ovambo societies in the 1880s.⁸¹ Young men herding cattle at the outposts in the Oshimpolo had to rely heavily on such foods.⁸²

The size and quantity of indigenous fruit trees startled early travellers to the region, especially in areas close to *oshanas*.⁸³ The tending of these trees was supervised by kings; laws forbade their abuse. The ubiquitous fan palm provided edible fruit; its pith was an important famine food.⁸⁴ Tapping of

⁷⁵ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 295. Rodin however notes these were grown in small quantities in 1940 in Oukwanyama (*Ethnobotany*, p 34). See also Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, pp 90-1.

⁷⁶ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 61; Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 295. See also Theodore Delachaux, 'Ethnographie de la Région du Cunène. Deuxième Mission Scientifique Suisse en Angola 1932-33', *Bulletin de la Société Neuchâteloise de Géographie*, Tome XLIV, Vol II, 1936, pp 49-50.

⁷⁷ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 295.

⁷⁸ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 62; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 56-7. Young boys also assisted in gathering food; see Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 41.

⁷⁹ Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 34.

⁸⁰ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 46. She refers to a similar food called *omakaka* in oshiNdonga.

⁸¹ Petrus Amutenya, 'Omizalo dhaakhulyenale aawambo', translated by Escher Luanda (unpublished manuscript, Okahau, 1990). Though he does not explicitly suggest the same, nonetheless see Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 34.

⁸² Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 150.

⁸³ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les différentes tribus des rives du Cunène, ca 1880; Galton, *Narrative*, p 125.

⁸⁴ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 57.

palms for wine was in the 1880s closely regulated by kings. The marula⁸⁵ was the most notable fruit tree, its fruit providing the base for the alcoholic beverage prepared by women each April,⁸⁶ a period in which men were legally prohibited from carrying arms. Marula fruits were also eaten raw, and oil extracted from their pips. Many species of fig were located in Ovamboland.⁸⁷ The mangetti fruit, found mainly in Oshimpolo and favoured greatly by the San, was among the ten or more additional indigenous fruits gathered by Ovambo women.

Game was the primary source of meat for most Ovambo. In the 1880s, while considerable forest belts still separated the polities (the 'realm of men') spatially from one another, these forest areas were the 'kingdom of the animals'.⁸⁸ Small antelope and spring hares were most widely hunted close to settled areas, especially by young boys herding cattle who carried bows and arrows.⁸⁹ With the spread of firearms bigger antelope were increasingly hunted out, as elephant had been.⁹⁰ Game tended to retreat to Oshimpolo and the Etosha pan, where large royal hunting parties operated at the beginning of the dry season.⁹¹

Fishing was a major seasonal source of food.⁹² The *efundja* normally brought large numbers of fish into the floodplain, where communal parties of women using baskets caught the greatest quantities.⁹³ The best time for

⁸⁵ *Sclerocarya caffra*, or *omuongo* in oshiKwayama. Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 34.

⁸⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 56.

⁸⁷ Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 148.

⁸⁸ Salokoski, Eirola and Siiskonen, 'Ovambo Kingdoms', p 219. They cite the Finnish missionary Pettinen from 1890.

⁸⁹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 59-60.

⁹⁰ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 59. Chapman's was a rare sighting of elephant, unlike Galton's and Andersson's earlier impression of plentiful big game. See Galton, *Narrative*, p 221; Charles John Andersson, *Lake Ngami* (London, 1856), p 194; idem, *Okavango River*, p 115; P. Serton (ed.), *The Narrative and Journal of Gerald McKiernan in South West Africa 1874-79* (Cape Town, 1954), pp 149-50; Haarhoff, *Wild South-West*, p 37; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 62; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 102.

⁹¹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 60.

⁹² Ibid., p 57. Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 162-3.

⁹³ Powell-Cotton Museum, D. and A. Powell-Cotton, 1937c, 'Fishing, Namacunde District, Lower Cunene'; Delachaux, 'Éthnographie', p 41.

fishing was the end of the *efundja*, when the waterholes began shrinking.⁹⁴ Poisons were sometimes used to kill or stupefy the fish which then floated to the surface. Long slender fishing spears, *ekupa*, were also used by men.⁹⁵ Frogs, whose population multiplied at the onset of rains, were a favourite food hunted by young boys.⁹⁶

Pastoralism

The Ovambo kept both small and large stock. Small stock, mainly goats, was of more importance for less wealthy households.⁹⁷ Sheep may have been introduced during Nama raids, but did not survive lungsickness, except in Ongandjera.⁹⁸ The Ovahimba also succeeded in raising sheep near the Kunene. Pigs were raised in some communities. Chickens were common to most homesteads, as were dogs,⁹⁹ the latter useful mainly in hunting but in Oukwanyama also part of the diet.

Cattle formed the most crucial part of the homestead economy. The Ovambo appear to have had their own distinctive breed, well-suited to rigorous local conditions.¹⁰⁰

They are probably much interbred, are small, rather short in the legs and horns, (several without horns) very hardy and capable of feeding on poor or sour grass, palm leaves etc. through the winter and drought. They drink brackwater which others will not touch. For native cattle they milk well.¹⁰¹

⁹⁴ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 57.

⁹⁵ Delachaux, 'Ethnographie', p 41; Rodin, *Ethnobotany*, p 33.

⁹⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 57.

⁹⁷ Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, p 111.

⁹⁸ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 42; interview with Petrus Amutenya, Okahau, 28.9.1989.

⁹⁹ Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, pp 190-4.

¹⁰⁰ Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, p 118.

¹⁰¹ NAN RCO 7/1922/3, Manning - Secretary SWA, 29.2.1916.

Some evidence existed of inter-mixing with 'Herero' cattle, possibly through the movements of people and stock occasioned by the Nama overlord Jonker Afrikaner's raiding to the north. Traces of Angolan breeds were also evident.¹⁰² On the whole, Ovambo cattle were a small but sturdy breed, more resistant to lungsickness after this became endemic, and, as slaughter beasts, heavier than neighbouring breeds.¹⁰³

Pastoral activities meshed in with the agricultural cycle to the extent that cattle were brought to graze on crop stubble after harvest, and their manure was utilised in the preparation of fields.¹⁰⁴ A few milch cows were always kept at the homestead to provide milk. But for the bulk of the family herd, household pastures were quickly exhausted in the dry season and cattle were sent to outposts where grass and water were available.¹⁰⁵ When drought affected the region, herds had to be broken up into small groups and pastoralism became relatively labour-intensive.¹⁰⁶

Herders sent to Oshimpolo with the bulk of a family's cattle grouped with other herders to build the cattle and calf enclosures, dig wells and seek pasture. An overall head herdsman was chosen; young boys accompanied such expeditions to milk, herd and gather *veldkos*. Butter was churned and returned to the homesteads at least twice during these months at the outposts.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Biblioteca da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa SGL: 898-A-27, Carlos Mittelburger, 'Poesia Pastoril do Cuanhama. Litteratura Oral Bantu' (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

¹⁰³ NAN RCO 7/1922/3, Manning - Secretary SWA, 29.2.1916..

¹⁰⁴ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 295; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 56. Siiskonen's argument that agriculture and pastoralism were poorly integrated because oxen were not used to plough is inappropriate for this period. Ploughs first came into use only in the late 1930s and 1940s. NAN NAO Vol 11 5/7/2, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 31.12.1938; OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 19.9.1939; interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Olukonda, 15.11.1989.

¹⁰⁵ Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, pp 107 and 110.

¹⁰⁶ It will be argued later in this thesis that these pastoral labour demands competed with mining labour demand in the colonial period, especially in the short-term post-famine spells of 1916-7 and 1930-1. See Chapters 6 and 7.

¹⁰⁷ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 149-50.

At the time of the great cattle festival in Oukwanyama, the beasts were returned to the settled areas and paraded so that their condition could be scrutinised.¹⁰⁸ The merits of respective herdsmen would be sung, and those who succeeded would be entrusted with larger numbers of cattle the following year, and allowed to keep more calves.¹⁰⁹

Cattle were slaughtered for meat only on great occasions; but milk was used by the homestead.¹¹⁰ Sour milk was eaten with millet porridge, *oshifima*,¹¹¹ while butter was an important cooking ingredient, especially in rich households, and was also used cosmetically.¹¹² As the main item of exchange, cattle were used in marriage payments, in ransom payments for clan members taken captive in war, in litigation, and to purchase rights to cultivate land. A small proportion of so-called sacred cattle were purely ritual and kept for their ceremonial significance.¹¹³

Pettinen assessed that in Ondonga in the 1890s, the number of cattle attached to prosperous households was between ten and twenty; poorer homesteads had very few.¹¹⁴ In the mid-nineteenth century missionaries estimated the Ndonga king Nangolo dha Amutenya possessed approximately 2,000 head of cattle.¹¹⁵

Cattle diseases which featured in Ovamboland at this time were lungsickness and, in 1897, rinderpest. The hunter-trader Chapman believed lungsickness to have entered southern Angola from Ovambo in 1861-2 and criticised the Portuguese failure to eradicate it.¹¹⁶ Its date of entry into

¹⁰⁸ Powell-Cotton Museum, D. and A. Powell-Cotton, 1936a, 'Feasts: of Cattle and New Grain'.

¹⁰⁹ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 150. The Kwanyama shared with other pastoral peoples the creation and transmission of praise poetry for their cattle. See Biblioteca da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa SGL: 98-A-27, Carlos Mittelburger, 'Poesia Pastoril do Cuanhama. Litteratura Oral Bantu' (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

¹¹⁰ Loeb, *ibid.*, pp 148-9.

¹¹¹ Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, p 198.

¹¹² Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 148-9.

¹¹³ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 42.

¹¹⁴ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 55.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 21.

Ovamboland itself is uncertain, but it is likely to have been brought by infected oxen on the trade routes from the south. Its local impact is virtually impossible to gauge from existing records, though it later had implications for Ovamboland's integration with the regional economy in the south.¹¹⁷

Non-agricultural production

In relation to the wider environment, Ovambo communities engaged in a variety of productive activities which went beyond domestic consumption and fed the vigorous local trade networks. Productive activities depended on resources in each group's environment, neatly encapsulated in McKiernan's description of 1876:

Nearly all of the Ovampo tribes have some distinctive article of trade. The Ovanganjera (Ongandjera) to the westward of Oquamba made earthen pots, the Ondongas to the eastward copper ornaments, the Okonyama or Evakunyama (Uukuanjama) to the north iron implements, the Ombanja (Ombandja) wooden bowls and drinking cups. A constant traffic is carried on between the tribes in these goods and, whether at peace or war, the merchants are never molested.¹¹⁸

Because they were close to the salt-pans in the southern plains between Ovamboland and Hereroland, the salt-gatherers and traders were the Ndonga, the Kwambi and the Ngandjera.

A brief outline of salt collection, consumption and trading is useful to illustrate patterns of surplus appropriation and exchange. Salt was fetched and refined solely during the dry season. Depending on the period of rains in

¹¹⁷ Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, p 213. German colonial policy in the 1880s and until ca 1904 was restricted to erecting a string of forts south of Ovamboland, ostensibly to control the spread of lungsickness and rinderpest, as well as to prevent arms smuggling. See Bley, *South West Africa*, pp 92-4; Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur*, p 92; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 67.

¹¹⁸ Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 100.

a given year, the salt fields opened in April or May and closed shortly before the new rains.¹¹⁹ The collection of salt was closely controlled by royalty. According to Schinz in the early 1890s, one or two trips per season were permitted by southern kings.¹²⁰ At the pans where drying surface water left behind salt deposits, the raw salt was cleaned and then cast into cone-shaped blocks up to three kilograms in weight. These were then brought back into the southern polities and divided up in exchange for grain and hoes.¹²¹ Accounts are not precise, but it would seem that the grain was in fact paid to kings. Those purchasing the salt both used it domestically and traded it with neighbouring communities as far as Kakonda and Huila.¹²²

The Ovambo also practised several crafts, of which metal-smithing was the most specialised. In Ondonga, a small group of smiths engaged in copper-working, using ore bartered from San who mined the copper near Otavi.¹²³ This formed one of several items of trade between Ondonga, other Ovambo polities and Hereroland.¹²⁴

In Oukwanyama great status was enjoyed by iron smiths, especially master blacksmiths, who were imbued with magical powers.¹²⁵ Their iron implements circulated throughout the region. The forested area north of Oukwanyama where the iron mines were located, referred to as Oshimanya,¹²⁶ was nominally owned by the Kwanyama smiths. Especially rich veins were found near Mupa, Okafima and Cassinga. Parallel with the southern Ovambo groups engaging in salt-collecting, the three northern communities that practised iron mining were the Kwanyama, the Vale and the Kafima. One oral source states that it was during the reign of King

¹¹⁹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 63-64.

¹²⁰ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 299.

¹²¹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 73.

¹²² Möller, *Journey through Angola*, p 126.

¹²³ Galton, *Narrative*, p 223.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 179, 184-5; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 76.

¹²⁵ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 191.

¹²⁶ Turvey, Zimmerman and Taapopi, *Kwanyama-English Dictionary* (Johannesburg, 1977), p 116.

Haimbili (ca 1811 to 1859) that Kwanyama iron workings at Oshimanya began.¹²⁷

Smiths were recognised only after lengthy and complex apprenticeships. Two types were known, the ordinary *omuleva* and the master smith, the *oshivanda*. Smiths left in small parties for the mine-workings at the beginning of the dry season, the expedition armed much like a war party, with several ordinary smiths under the leadership of one *oshivanda*.¹²⁸ Their mining camp was usually visited by San who bartered *veldkos* (especially mangetti nuts) and meat for tobacco.¹²⁹ Most smelting was performed during the early part of the season. The tools of the Kwanyama smithing trade were the hammer, tongs and anvil.¹³⁰ Master smiths usually made only axe and hoe blades, while the *omuleva* made many other implements, including spear and arrow heads, daggers, knives, nut picks, bracelets and beads. Hoes were an important item in bridewealth payments.

Potting was the preserve of women. The best clays and reputedly the best potters were located in Uukwambi, Oukwanyama and Ombalantu. Clay pots were made mostly for cooking and as milk and beer containers, varying greatly in quality. Potting began at the end of the rainy season when good clay became available from the bottom of the drying *oshanas*. Potting was only undertaken at times of the new moon, and certain rituals were involved. 'The most skilled among them pay tribute to the king with some of their beer pots and receive in return a cow or some prized decorations.'¹³¹

¹²⁷ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 20.4.1989.

¹²⁸ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1901-13.

¹²⁹ In the 1880s San permission probably had to be gained before Kwanyama smiths could proceed to Oshimanya (Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 192); in the 1930s the Powell-Cotton sisters noted that San would attach themselves to a smithing camp for the whole season and receive tobacco, hemp and knives in exchange for meat and fruits. Powell-Cotton Museum, D. and A. Powell-Cotton, 1938, 'Mining, smelting and forging of iron by the Vakwanyama of southern Angola'.

¹³⁰ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1901-13.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, translated by and cited in Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 194.

Other productive activities centred on the homestead included the making of ostrich-egg-shell necklaces, the dyeing of these with red powder bartered from San, hairdressing - each Ovambo community had its own distinctive and elaborate women's hairstyle - and the leather-making necessary to provide skirts, loin-cloths and sandals.¹³² Finally, wood-work was performed by male members of the *eumbo* especially in the construction of the homestead, whose palisading required great quantities of wooden stakes. Some craft work was also evident, especially bowls and goblets, for which the Kwambi and the Mbandja were most noted.¹³³ These activities were also confined to the dry season.

Differentiation in Ovamboland: households and slavery

Kings nominally controlled all the land, granting usufruct for the lifetime of the head of household (*omwene keumbo*), although this tenure could be revoked.¹³⁴ The re-allocation of land after the death of the *omwene keumbo* was normal, though on rare occasions the widow could retain tenure through payment. Usufruct included the sinking of wells for family use, though special regulations applied to the care of fruit trees¹³⁵ which formed an important part of the regulation of local food resources.

Younger men established their own households after marriage, but usually spent the first few years living with their first wife in the father's household. Young men probably depended on maternal uncles for the cattle to pay brideprice and the fee to king or headman (*elenga*) from whom the

¹³² Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 60-1.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p 61; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 199-200.

¹³⁴ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 42-4; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 44; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 98; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 52

¹³⁵ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901.

household plot was obtained. Prime sites for gardens were near the *oshana*, for which a higher fee was necessary.¹³⁶

Socio-economic differentiation was particularly highlighted in the size of the *eumbo*. As hoe agriculture was labour-intensive, Ovamboland shared with most other agricultural African societies a high incidence of polygyny.¹³⁷ It was not unusual in the latter half of the nineteenth century for wealthy men to have up to ten wives,¹³⁸ and poorer men two, many only one.¹³⁹ Obtaining cattle for marriage and the establishment of new households became increasingly problematic for aspiring independent householders during the last pre-colonial decades.¹⁴⁰ The interval between marriage and the establishment of a new *eumbo* could be very lengthy.¹⁴¹

While residence was patrilocal,¹⁴² matriliney informed such practices as inheritance.¹⁴³ Marriage in these exogamous¹⁴⁴ societies was not as important a means of circulating cattle wealth between clans as in patrilineal societies such as the Nguni,¹⁴⁵ because high bridewealth payment was not the case in Ovambo communities. One head of cattle was the agreed payment from the husband's family to that of the wife.¹⁴⁶ Other gifts accompanied this, such as hoes for the bride's mother and necklaces. Divorce in pre-colonial Ovambo

¹³⁶ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 98.

¹³⁷ Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1988), p 45; Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (London, 1970), p 50.

¹³⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 44.

¹³⁹ Schinz, *Deutsch Südwest-Afrika*, p 311; he based his observation on Ondonga.

¹⁴⁰ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', pp 104-5.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 97; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 235.

¹⁴² Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 99.

¹⁴³ Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, p 149; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 49; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', pp 98-9; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 108-10.

¹⁴⁴ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 72; Maija Tuupainen, *Marriage in a matrilineal African tribe. A Social Anthropological Study of Marriage in the Ondonga Tribe in Ovamboland* (Helsinki, 1970), pp 28-40; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 44. Oral sources suggest that Ombandja was the only exception to this exogamous rule. Interview with Reverend Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 29.10.1989.

¹⁴⁵ Tuupainen, *Marriage*, p 153.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 56-9.

was an accessible institution; the bride's family returned all bridewealth gifts, but kept her children as they formed part of the matrilineal clan.¹⁴⁷

Gender and age division of labour has been mentioned earlier, with its stress on female agricultural labour. An important institution in Ovamboland in the 1880s was slavery.¹⁴⁸ It was a significant indicator of socio-economic differentiation between and within households.

It is uncertain how long slavery had been a feature of Ovambo societies before the 1880s. Most sources agree that those who entered this slave category were war captives whose relatives had failed to ransom them.¹⁴⁹ Raiding for captives underwent a transformation in Ovamboland in the late nineteenth century, through both an articulation with the long-distance slave trade centred in Angola¹⁵⁰ and intensification of internal slavery.¹⁵¹ These processes were connected with the greater penetration of merchant capital into the eastern Ovambo polities in particular.

In this chapter the primary concern is internal slavery. The lack of attention this question has received in studies of nineteenth century Ovambo societies must be largely attributed to its low profile; slavery was not so harshly exploitative as to be obvious to outsiders. Loeb concluded on the basis of earlier evidence that 'the Kwanyama had slavery in a weakened form', and 'no slave caste developed.'¹⁵² Lebzelter also emphasised their favourable position.¹⁵³

These perceptions arose partly from a problem of different concepts of slavery, Western and African. African social categories of dependency seldom

¹⁴⁷ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 257-9; E.M Wolfe, *Beyond the thirst belt. The story of the Ovamboland mission* (London, 1935), p 21.

¹⁴⁸ Clarence-Smith, 'Angolan connection', p 172.

¹⁴⁹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 205; interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 66).

¹⁵⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 215-6.

¹⁵¹ Clarence-Smith, 'Angolan Connection', p 172.

¹⁵² Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 124-5.

¹⁵³ 'Ihre Stellung...so angenehme.' Viktor Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen in Südwest- und Südafrika. Wissenschaftliche Ergebnisse einer Forschungsreise nach Süd- und Südwestafrika in den Jahren 1926-1928* (Leipzig, 1934), p 238.

correspond exactly to the Western category of 'slave'. This adds to the problem of identifying the extent of slavery in societies such as the Kwanyama. Kopytoff ascribes this difficulty generally to

the Western tendency to make an association between 'slavery' and palpable deprivation (which, in Africa, need not occur) and in the African tendency to hide from any outsider the number of dependents under one's control.¹⁵⁴

The low visibility of slavery in Ovamboland was mostly due to the mechanisms of absorption of slaves or acquired dependents into the acquirers' clans.¹⁵⁵ This was ritualised. The captive was taken to the captor's reception area (*olupale*), smeared with red ochre and given a drink extracted from a herb called *ondimbwa*,¹⁵⁶ to erase the memory of previous home and identity.¹⁵⁷ The war captive turned slave had no clan (*ezimo*). His or her incorporation into the captor's clan was effectively a demarginalization, establishing kinship-like relations and using kinship metaphors.¹⁵⁸ Yet the extent of demarginalization varied, and even where it was fullest the assimilated was subject to kinship relations which often embodied authority and obligation, so that the resulting position was not necessarily 'benign'.¹⁵⁹

Historians have emphasised the opportunities of social mobility for male slaves in royal Ovambo households.¹⁶⁰ Williams shows the prominence gained by Iitamale as Ipumbu's war commander and Hamupanda as Nehale's chief counsellor.¹⁶¹ Hamukoto wa Kapa became one of the biggest headmen in Oukwanyama, and carried over his position into the colonial period, even

¹⁵⁴ Igor Kopytoff, 'The Cultural Context of African Abolition', in Suzanne Miers and Richard Roberts (eds.), *The End of Slavery in Africa* (Wisconsin, 1988), p 487.

¹⁵⁵ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 102.

¹⁵⁶ In oshiKwanyama the meaning of the verb *okudimbwa* is to forget. Turvey, Zimmermann, Taapopi, *Kwanyama-English Dictionary*, p 5.

¹⁵⁷ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 125.

¹⁵⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 205.

¹⁵⁹ Kopytoff, 'Cultural Context', p 491.

¹⁶⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 205.

¹⁶¹ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 114.

though he was of Kavango slave origin.¹⁶² But what has not been noted in the case of such prominent male slaves is the 'ambiguity of absorption.'¹⁶³ While these slaves were removed from the limbo of kinlessness and integrated into their new societies, their foreign origin still made them distinct.¹⁶⁴

A similarly 'benign' impression of the position of female slaves in household structures was conveyed by German missionaries. Sckär noted that the condition of slaves in Kwanyama households was unlike that of slaves in America before emancipation.¹⁶⁵ Wulfhorst, on a visit to Nekoto's *eumbo*, related his positive impression of the young women stamping corn, 'both slave girls and free girls, a happy company'.¹⁶⁶

But despite their incorporation into family structures, female slaves were clearly subordinated within domestic relations. This showed primarily in the smaller portions of land allocated to them, and in demarcations over participation in religious rituals.¹⁶⁷ Most revealing of the limited extent of demarginalisation were relations within the *eumbo* itself. If the head of household had to travel or visit the king, he could not spend the previous night with any female slave. Sexual intercourse with these women was also forbidden on days of domestic religious offering. The predominance of free married women was particularly noticeable when the husband was absent. Any visitor was met on the periphery of the homestead by a slave woman, who applied to the wife for permission to enter. Should the slave wish to receive or cook for her own visitor, she had to obtain the wife's permission.¹⁶⁸

This socio-religious subordination of female slaves was displayed in the physical structure of the *eumbo*. As a corollary to their exclusion from

¹⁶² Interview with Johannes Shihepo, Ongwediva, 7.10.1989.

¹⁶³ Frederick Cooper, 'The Problem of Slavery in African Studies', *JAH*, 20, 1 (1979), p 107.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

¹⁶⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, 'Haschipala, Bilder aus dem Leben d. Heiden i/Ovamboland', ca 1919-33.

¹⁶⁷ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

domestic religious ceremonies, they could not enter the inner part of the homestead, nor could their children. Even if the head of household had no wives, the female slaves belonging to the household occupied peripheral huts and were not allowed into the inner part of the *eumbo*. Only formally-married wives could participate in domestic religious practices. Finally, at her death, a female slave was mourned for only one day, like a small girl or infant, and like a female child she was buried in the stamping-room of the *eumbo*.¹⁶⁹ Thus, while female slaves were incorporated into their captors' clans, exclusions still operated. Sckär concluded that female slaves were restricted to agricultural and domestic labour, and sexual services.¹⁷⁰

The kings' large establishments consisted largely of slaves,¹⁷¹ who were refugees or unransomed war captives.¹⁷² Their numbers could assist kings and bigger headmen to undermine lineages,¹⁷³ but lineages could also strengthen themselves by incorporating slaves.¹⁷⁴ As Cooper argues, the main site of struggle over use of slaves was between lineage and king or ruling class.¹⁷⁵ Within lineages and households, however, slavery revealed internal cleavages. The relations of female slaves with free women in the domestic sphere showed stratification along the lines of class and gender. Slavery was probably also a factor in generational tension. It is unclear whether the intensification of raiding and the taking of female captives helped younger men to establish new households. Evidence collected by Sckär¹⁷⁶ suggests that the founding of new households with female captives might have been an attractive option for cadets in Oukwanyama, had not richer and older men accumulated the captives. But the greatest restriction on younger men

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885; AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

¹⁷² AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885.

¹⁷³ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 77.

¹⁷⁴ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 102.

¹⁷⁵ Cooper, 'Problem of Slavery', p 107.

¹⁷⁶ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

establishing households with female slaves was the latter's social marginality. Domestic religious restrictions on slave women in the household meant that younger men with female slaves would still seek free marriage partners to occupy the 'inner part of the homestead'.¹⁷⁷

Physical layout of the homestead

As the peripheral location of slaves suggests, the physical design of Ovambo homesteads expressed domestic relations. The structure and layout of the *eumbo* had both symbolic and functional determinants.¹⁷⁸ One symbolic feature was the placing of hut entrances to face east,¹⁷⁹ a direction associated with positive supernatural forces. A more functional feature was the high palisade of wooden stakes surrounding each homestead.¹⁸⁰ Within it was a system of passages which reduced accessibility to each part of the household. Visitors passed through high passages into a circular area called the *olupale*. The wealthier the household, the more intricate was the passage system. The royal homestead (*embala*), was the most complex in design and needed many thousands of poles for its construction,¹⁸¹ achieving a unique degree of security and privacy.¹⁸² Interior palisading also separated off areas for grinding, for each wife and for the head of household, for butter production and milk storage, for guests and children. Cattle enclosures for calves and

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ See Glen Trevor Mills, 'An inquiry into the structure and function of space in indigenous settlement in Ovamboland' (MA dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1984), p 3.

¹⁷⁹ Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 292; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 209-10.

¹⁸⁰ Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, p 58.

¹⁸¹ For descriptions of a homestead see inter alia Galton, *Narrative*, p 217; Hahn, Vedder and Fourie, *Native Tribes*, pp 12-4.

¹⁸² Siiskonen, 'Environmental Impacts', p 8.

oxen were often contained within the homestead, but the main cattle enclosure was attached to the periphery.¹⁸³

Most households moved the site of their *eumbo* every four to seven years, uprooting old stakes if they had survived termites.¹⁸⁴ The consequent destruction of forest of this style of palisading was first noticeable in Ondonga, where millet stalks began replacing poles in construction by at least the early 1900s.¹⁸⁵

Social élites: kings and omalenga

Most Ovambo polities in the 1880s were kingships; Ombalantu was the most notable exception.¹⁸⁶ The prerogatives of kings were religious, judicial, military and administrative; all the land and its resources were at the king's disposal and the largest cattle herds were concentrated in royal hands.¹⁸⁷ Kings not only controlled the allocation of means of production, but intervened ritually at strategic phases in both agricultural and pastoral production cycles, aided by royal diviners with whom they surrounded themselves. They announced when subjects could begin cultivation and harvest. Labour in the king's fields was mandatory. The return of cattle from the outposts was ritualised in the *omaludi engobe* ceremony, presided over by the king,¹⁸⁸ after which the cattle browsed the stalks remaining in the fields. The king also opened the fruit-harvesting during the marula (*ogongo*) season.

¹⁸³ Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, p 58; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 184-5; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 51.

¹⁸⁴ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 52; Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, p 292; Hahn, Vedder and Fourie, *Native Tribes*, p 12.

¹⁸⁵ Siiskonen, 'Environmental Impacts', p 14.

¹⁸⁶ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les différentes tribus des rives du Cunène, ca 1880.

¹⁸⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 55.

¹⁸⁸ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 215-17; Powell-Cotton Museum, D. and A. Powell-Cotton, 1936a, 'Feasts: of Cattle and New Grain'.

Several researchers have argued that ecological pressures necessitated centralised social organisation around kings.¹⁸⁹ Much has been made of their role in the construction of water reservoirs. Kings organised labour to deepen pools in the water channels or *oshanas*, which could hold water well into the dry season. The French missionary Duparquet observed such a reservoir in Ombandja in the 1880s, with fruit trees planted on the banks.¹⁹⁰ The mobilisation of labour for such tasks no doubt contributed to the centralisation of Ovambo kingships. But it should not be considered in isolation from the whole complex of political and religious 'management' of natural resources which occurred in this fragile ecological setting. Allocation of fertile land on the edges of *oshanas* to favoured subjects was arguably another reason for centralisation of power.¹⁹¹ The care of fruit trees was also a royal prerogative. Certainly in Oukwanyama and Ondonga regulations prohibited the cutting down of fruit trees for firewood.¹⁹² Oral sources claimed that these environmental controls began to weaken under Weyulu ya Hedimbi and Nande ya Hedimbi¹⁹³ and in certain respects under colonial rule after 1915.¹⁹⁴ Implicit in the discourse which emerges from oral history is the assertion that the centralised system of rulings to manage natural resources and to regulate their distribution had positive results in the interaction between flood plain communities and their environment.

Rain-making powers, so crucial in this environment, were mediated through kingship in several ways. Kings who belonged to the rain-making clan were themselves rain-makers, though by the 1880s this clan had long

¹⁸⁹ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 98; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 45.

¹⁹⁰ AGCSSp 478-B-II, Duparquet - TRP, 25.7.1883; AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les différentes tribus des rives du Cunène, ca 1880. See also Velloso de Castro, *A Campanha do Cuamato* (Luanda, 1908), p 185-6; Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 104.

¹⁹¹ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 98.

¹⁹² NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901.

¹⁹³ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 42-3).

¹⁹⁴ Urquhart, *Patterns of Settlement*, p 40.

been superseded as rulers, at least in Ondonga.¹⁹⁵ Kings mostly employed sorcerers with rain-making powers or sent ritual gifts to the king of Evale,¹⁹⁶ the most potent Ovambo rain-maker.

Tensions between kings and headmen or counsellors (*omalenga*) were central to Ovambo politics. Each polity was divided into administrative districts called *oshikandjo*, presided over by *omalenga*. The districts were subdivided into wards, called *omikunda*, supervised by sub-headmen.¹⁹⁷ *Omalenga* were either members of the royal clan, close relatives of the king, royal appointees or had been appointed by a previous king and retained under the new incumbent.

The main responsibility of *omalenga* was the administration of their *oshikandjo*. Within these districts, in a period up to the 1880s, *omalenga* arbitrated in minor legal disputes, organised labour for the king's fields or bigger public projects, and levied war bands. Siiskonen, whose Finnish sources focus on Ondonga, argues that *omalenga* also collected a 'grain-tax' for kings from all households,¹⁹⁸ but evidence from Oukwanyama does not suggest such a degree of systematisation. Another form of exaction performed by *omalenga* for kings was the *okasava*, literally an internal cattle raid on subjects.¹⁹⁹ Contemporary sources suggest that as long as these raids were for the benefit of kings, subjects were unlikely to resist.²⁰⁰

Clarence-Smith and Moorsom's representation of the *omalenga* is slightly misleading. They state:

¹⁹⁵ Frieda-Nela Williams, 'Ovambo Migration 1600-1900. A Study of Ovambo Traditions of Origin' (unpublished paper, Oulu Nallikari, 1988), p 27.
¹⁹⁶ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13; Shityuwete, *Never Follow the Wolf*, p 1; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 63-5; Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, pp 238-40; Warneck, 'Studien zur Religion der Ovambo' *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift*, Vol 37, 1910, p 322.
¹⁹⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 46-7.
¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 47.
¹⁹⁹ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 83.
²⁰⁰ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, p 125.

The increase in raiding had led to the foundation at court of a permanent group of war-leaders, the *lenga*, each of whom received a horse and a number of rifles from the king and led a body of about a hundred men on raiding expeditions.²⁰¹

The mistaken idea here is that *omalenga* constituted a new incipient class, bred by foreign trade. Moreover, a confusion over terminology has arisen from the use of *omalenga* to mean war-leaders. Military leadership constituted only one of the functions of *omalenga*. The probable reason for this misconception is that it was solely as war leaders that *omalenga* appeared to the victims of Kwanyama raids outside Ovamboland and to researchers using Angola-based sources. The term *omalenga* properly signifies those headmen in charge of districts. They participated on the king's council and had overall command of the warbands they raised, whether for the king or - as later transpired - for their own ends.

The most powerful *omalenga* had royal connections. Under the Kwanyama king Weyulu ya Hedimbi (1885-1904), headmen of royal lineage, especially the king's brothers, were the chief councillors.²⁰² These members of the royal family typically exercised power over the largest districts and often posed separatist threats. The Spiritan missionary Lecomte described Nande ya Hedimbi, for example, as being the king Weyulu's viceroy in northern Oukwanyama, and erroneously believed the kingdom had been split between the two.²⁰³ Actual fission was not uncommon. Ondonga, Evale and Ombandja all split into two sections at different points in time, most often because of the frustrated ambitions of unsuccessful claimants to kingship. Under matrilineal influence, royal women had comparable powers with the most prominent

²⁰¹ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 104.

²⁰² AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1901-13.

²⁰³ AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte - Grizard, 1.9.1899.

male *omalenga*.²⁰⁴ Similarities exist with the Swazi case in terms of the special role played by the Queen Mother, especially in the politics of succession.²⁰⁵

Yet most *omalenga* were commoners; for these the office of *lenga* was not permanent and could be sold to a higher bidder.²⁰⁶ Nogueira, a *mestiço* trader long resident in Onkhumbi, wrote in 1881 that only those *omalenga* who resided near the king tended to serve permanently on his council, while many others who remained resident in their districts served as councillors only temporarily.²⁰⁷

The Rhenish missionary Sckär claimed that each new Kwanyama king appointed his own new *omalenga*, not always discarding all his predecessor's councillors but certainly the majority. The inauguration of a new king, argues Sckär, was the juncture at which most commoner *omalenga* were appointed. These had usually been the king's close associates when heir apparent, nominated because trusted by the incumbent.²⁰⁸ The problem with this account is that it is both frozen in time and idealised; further evidence would be necessary to support or refute this view that the reign of a king coincided with the rule of a certain set of *omalenga*. But whether or not the principle he outlined coincided with practice, Sckär's account illuminated the dynamic of royal-élite relations by describing the feast which the new king and *omalenga* celebrated at the beginning of a new reign:

When the wake for the previous king ended, the new king collected his chosen headmen and they entered the forest for a feast. The feast signified the king's peace with his headmen; for the headmen it was a pledge of loyalty. A steer and an enemy war-leader were killed, the liver and heart of both removed,

²⁰⁴ AVEM c/k 22 No 3, Wulfhorst, Nekoto and Haischi in Zwistigkeit, ca 1910-33; c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, Haschipala, Bilder aus dem Leben d. Heiden i/Ovamboland, ca 1910-33.

²⁰⁵ Philip Bonner, *Kings, Commoners and Concessionaires. The Evolution and Dissolution of the Nineteenth-Century Swazi State* (Cambridge, 1982), pp 25 and 209.

²⁰⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 47.

²⁰⁷ A.F. Nogueira, *A Raça Negra* (Lisbon, 1881), p 267.

²⁰⁸ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

cooked together and eaten. Through this the men took strength from the enemy; it was a form of initiation.²⁰⁹

The intention in quoting this passage is to emphasise the importance of kings cementing the loyalty of their *omalenga*. In a large centralised kingdom such as Oukwanyama, this fidelity was vital to the integrity of the *oshilongo*, the nation.

Old faultlines of rivalry between kings and headmen certainly existed. The increasing impact of long-distance trade from the 1880s intensified such tensions, since kings and *omalenga* were best poised to take advantage of new opportunities.²¹⁰ They competed increasingly over resources gained from raiding, internally and externally. By the 1880s ivory had virtually disappeared as a trade commodity; cattle and captives were now the basis of exchange for modern rifles, alcohol, clothing and other consumer goods.²¹¹ This was most striking in the eastern Kwanyama and Ndonga polities which were most engaged with merchant capitalism.

War and raiding

The conventional picture of war and raiding in the Ovambo floodplain and the changes these underwent usually has a very short time-depth.²¹² These accounts accurately depict short-term transformations, which have parallels with pre-colonial African polities elsewhere, but a longer perspective on raiding activities and militarisation reveals a great deal more about changes in social organisation.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 100.

²¹¹ See Chapter 3.

²¹² See Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', pp 102-4; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 203-16.

By the second half of the nineteenth century male circumcision had been abolished in Ondonga, Oukwanyama and possibly other Ovambo kingships. The refusal of the Kwanyama king Mweshipandeka to undergo circumcision²¹³ at his succession in ca 1856²¹⁴ has been represented as a definitive rejection of this ritual in the Kwanyama polity.²¹⁵ The abolition took place in the context of succession disputes²¹⁶ and followed Kwanyama success in breaking away from Nkhumbi hegemony.²¹⁷ In the Kwanyama case, the ending of male circumcision is significant because circumcision had been controlled by lineage elders; its abolition suggests the weakening of their power to the advantage of the king, especially with regard to the labour of young men. A short-term reason for the change may have been continued Nkhumbi threats to Kwanyama independence; longer-term pressures were posed by the advancing 'slaving frontier', the diffused impact of the Angolan slave trade down to the far south.²¹⁸ The abolition of male circumcision realigned the polity on more centralised and military lines.

In a sense, Oukwanyama was an incipient military state - though no more - when increasingly modernised weaponry entered circulation and raiding began to intensify in the 1880s. Before the arrival of firearms and great economic pressures to raid, the *ekumbu*, whereby 'the king sent men to attack another tribe with the aim of capturing cattle, goats, people and other valuable property',²¹⁹ was of very long standing and virtually an annual

²¹³ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 34); AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1902-13; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 237.

²¹⁴ 1853 is the succession date given in Beatrix Heintze, 'Kwanyama and Ndonga Chronology. Some Notes', *Journal of the S.W.A. Wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft*, 1972-3, p 52.

²¹⁵ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 236.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*; interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 30-4); interview with Petrus Amutenya, Okahau, 8.10.1989.

²¹⁷ Péliissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 61. Sources are not as explicit as to the context of its abolition in Ondonga.

²¹⁸ Joseph Miller, *Way of death: merchant capitalism and the Angolan slave trade, 1730-1830* (London, 1988), p 140. See Chapter 3.

²¹⁹ Interview with Adolf Ambambi, Oshigambo, 23.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 139).

activity of the dry season.²²⁰ The purpose of the *ekumbu* was to obtain cattle and captives, the latter to be ransomed for cattle, hoes or beads.²²¹ Ransom varied from between one to ten head of cattle, and was mostly four to eight head.²²² Raiding was usually carried out against militarily weaker communities.²²³ It was not confined to Ovamboland, but extended north of the Kunene during the drier season when the river was low. The Mbandja and Kwanyama were the most active in raiding to the north of the Kunene in the mid-nineteenth century.²²⁴

Elaborate and secret preparations for raids were made by kings and their closest councillors, with extensive use of spies.²²⁵ Only in the final stages of preparation were the less important commanders informed, among them the district headmen who were necessary for raising men for the warband.²²⁶ In Ondonga in the 1870s and 1880s, Finnish missionaries seemed to be the last to hear of raids.²²⁷

Accounts emphasise that when the warbands went on raids in this early period, killing was not encouraged.²²⁸ The purpose of raids was not to rob whole communities or subjugate them, but to split off and remove selected herds.²²⁹ Siiskonen suggests from Finnish sources that when a warband returned from a raid, the leader divided the spoils so that each soldier received one head of cattle, while the reconnaissance spies and outstanding fighters received several head.²³⁰ However, accounts of actual

²²⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 203 and 206.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p 205; interview with Nathanael Nghatanga, Okaku, 3.3.1990; interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 87); Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 61; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 83.

²²² Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, p 124; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 205.

²²³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 212.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p 203; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 85.

²²⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 203-4.

²²⁷ Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, *passim*.

²²⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 204.

²²⁹ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 67).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

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²²² Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, p 124; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 205.

²²³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 212.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, p 203; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 85.

²²⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 203-4.

²²⁷ Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, *passim*.

²²⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 204.

²²⁹ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 67).

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

raids suggest that distribution was less systematic. Most booty was taken to the king, who divided it with his war commanders.²³¹

In the late nineteenth century a shift was discernible from minimal violence in raids to a degree of killing that was initially traumatic.²³² This was partly due to the adoption of firearms and the greater mobility of commanders on horseback, which allowed for greater speed of communication and attack.²³³ But this increased violence must be seen against a backdrop of economic pressures which necessitated quantitative increases in cattle and captives raided.²³⁴

Though merchant capital will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, it is worth noting one of its first direct effects on hitherto relatively isolated Ovambo societies. The irruption of Nama warbands into southwestern Africa was itself a product of powerful changes centred on the Cape. When Marks and Atmore argue that it was through the southern African Khoisan and coloured population that 'the "gun frontier" preceded the white man amongst the Nama and Herero of south-west Africa',²³⁵ the Ovambo were yet another example. The Ovambo adopted both guns and the Nama model of warbands - the commando - in a remodelled version suited to Ovambo purposes. Firearms changed the manner of war, especially for the Kwanyama, Ndonga and Kwambi who participated most in the trade.²³⁶ Horsickness prevented horses being widely used in war except by leaders,²³⁷ so a finely adapted amalgam of the old raiding party with spears, knives and *kieries*²³⁸ and some firearms carried by groups of two or three

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., p 208.

²³³ Henrique Pires Monteiro, *Pacificação do Sul de Angola, 1914-15* (Lisbon, 1947).

²³⁴ Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, pp 113 and 115; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 76-7; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', pp 102-3.

²³⁵ Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore, 'Firearms in Southern Africa: A Survey', *JAH*, XII, 4 (1971), p 519.

²³⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 208-9.

²³⁷ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 76.

²³⁸ Interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 90).

hundred on foot was led by commanders on horseback with modern rifles²³⁹ - a new model of the southern African commando. Basic units of one hundred fighters, called *etanga*²⁴⁰ by the Kwanyama, joined together to go for war, split into smaller units for attack and reunited for the journey back. Speed and mobility were enhanced.²⁴¹

Atmore, Chirenje and Mudenge argue that firearms were most effective in south central Africa when adopted by societies with little or no formal military structure.²⁴² In the Ovambo case, leaders were able to adapt existing military structures to commando-style tactics. The same authors suggest that in the Portuguese Zambezi valley with its armed bands, and to some extent in Mashonaland where chiefdoms armed with guns emerged, the scale of regional violence increased.²⁴³ The same happened in bigger Ovambo polities such as Oukwanyama, which emulated and in the 1890s eclipsed the Nama commandos raiding into southern Angola.²⁴⁴ Also, where these authors argue that changes in Tswana military organisation and tactics, based upon Griqua or Boer commando models, must have affected a wider range of social and political institutions,²⁴⁵ much the same will be argued for the Ovambo case in the next chapter.

The new model of Ovambo warbands also turned inwards on their own populations for increased 'tributary' exactions. This compounded changes in the military ethos associated with war and external raiding. Older men claimed in the 1890s that before guns appeared, fighters were braver, especially when hunting or killing elephant and lion.²⁴⁶ One account preserved by a German missionary emphasises this shift in military values:

²³⁹ Monteiro, *Pacificação*.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Anthony Atmore, J.M. Chirenje and S.I. Mudenge, 'Firearms in South Central Africa,' *JAH*, XII, 4 (1971), p 555.

²⁴³ Ibid., p 556.

²⁴⁴ AHU 2R 2S P 18, Governador de Mossamedes - Governador Geral, 22.1.1894.

²⁴⁵ Atmore, Chirenje and Mudenge, 'Firearms', p 555.

²⁴⁶ August Wulfhorst, *Von Hexen und Zauberern* (Wuppertal-Barmen, 1935), p 8.

Earlier there were brave warriors; they penetrated neighbouring lands, returning with rich booty of cattle and war captives. Thus the chief became rich. He also took care that the headmen did not keep everything for themselves, as now happens. The war captives would be ransomed; that gave rich yields. Today though the brave warriors of the chief steal the cattle of their countrymen. Is that courage? They are too anxious to go into war and struggle with enemies. We did it differently.²⁴⁷

In the 1890s, outsiders rated the courage in combat of Mbandja or Vale fighters, who still relied greatly on traditional weapons, higher than Kwanyama who used a greater proportion of firearms. Catholic missionaries in southern Angola recounted how spirited resistance usually deterred Kwanyama raiders from pursuing the struggle.²⁴⁸ Audacity, speed and trickery were valued in Kwanyama warfare.²⁴⁹ Modifications in raiding parties did not contribute notably to any intangible martial spirit, so favoured in white schemas of militarised African people at that time.²⁵⁰ Not enough is known to be able to judge whether any new code of honour emerged among the new warbands and fledgling military aristocracy, though it can be argued that King Mandume ya Ndemufayo (1911-17) later articulated one.²⁵¹ Permanent standing armies did not emerge, though the size of fixed escorts around king and *omalenga* increased.²⁵² Fighters were summoned by the *omalenga* ordering a *levée en masse* from their districts.²⁵³

²⁴⁷ Ibid., p 7.

²⁴⁸ BG 24 1907-08, p 449.

²⁴⁹ See NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, pp 43-44, for an account of a Kwanyama raid on the author's wagon party at the Kunene river, twenty minutes from a Portuguese military fort.

²⁵⁰ Atmore, Chirenje and Mudenge, 'Firearms', p 556.

²⁵¹ See Chapter 5. The stereotypes of Ovambo fighters held by missionaries and traders as non-martial were not completely shared by Portuguese, German and South African colonial governments. After their 1904 defeat by the Mbandja the Portuguese emphasised the formidable size of Ovambo 'armies', and the extent to which they were armed with modern rifles. A particular Portuguese myth was of an 'Ovambo league'. See Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 464. To a large extent German and South African perceptions followed this Portuguese lead.

²⁵² AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885.

²⁵³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 203-4.

Even after these changes in military organisation, the object of raiding was not territorial conquest but the seizure of cattle and captives.²⁵⁴ The Kwanyama claimed overlordship over areas such as Oukwangali and Ngangela which they raided annually and initiated systems of tribute from these states.²⁵⁵

In this increasingly militarised atmosphere, a crucial aspect of each Ovambo polity was its intelligence system. No king was safe from internal or external threat if his intelligence system was ineffective. Spies from other communities, if caught, were dealt with summarily. People moving between communities on visits had to take precautions not to arouse suspicions that they were spies.²⁵⁶

Though Miller makes no analysis of intelligence systems,²⁵⁷ his depiction of Angolan societies suggests that an essential element in a community's integrity was its vigilance over outsiders. Espionage among Ovambo communities was highly developed, and later networks connecting Ovambo with the outside world were impressive. The San groups living in the Oshimpolo and the southern margins of Ovambo were extensively used to inform on the movements of foreign hunters and traders, and especially the later movement of German troops when military posts were erected after 1900.²⁵⁸ Migrant workers later brought a wealth of intelligence back to Ovamboland. In the 1880s those long-standing traders who were trusted by kings were a very important source of information on the outside world.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ BG 27 1913-14, p 778.

²⁵⁶ Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, *passim*.

²⁵⁷ Miller, *Way of death*, p 27.

²⁵⁸ Martti Eirola, 'Reservation', pp 6-7.

²⁵⁹ AVEM c/k 22 No 3, Wulfhorst, Schihepo und Schalulange, ca 1910-33; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs*, *passim*.

Origins and traditions of origins

The Ovambo belong linguistically to the southern branch of the Western Bantu-speakers.²⁶⁰ Their precursors, the 'Kunene River group', were a southern splinter of these Western Bantu farmers and probably reached northern Namibia during the second half of the first millennium A.D.²⁶¹ No doubt this movement occurred in highly gradual and differentiated phases, over a very long continuum. Pfouts' linguistic study connects the Herero and Kwangari with the Kunene River group; the later divergence of the Kunene River group and the emergence of Ovambo dialects can be traced to the early centuries of the present millennium.²⁶² Probably from this time the generic name 'Ovambo' emerged.²⁶³ Ovambo origins are linked to those of the Herero in oral traditions of origin.²⁶⁴ Oral traditions also reveal a great deal about relations with San groups; the latter were marginalised into 'jungle areas' outside the core areas of Ovambo settlement.²⁶⁵

This chapter does not aim to trace the origins of the Ovambo through their oral traditions. But because of the 'fundamentally ideological nature'²⁶⁶ of traditions, those which were current in the 1880s can reveal a great deal

²⁶⁰ For accounts of Western Bantu expansion see James Denbow, 'Congo to Kalahari: data and hypotheses about Early Iron Age political economy', *The African Archaeological Review*, 8 (1990), pp 142-3; Jan Vansina, 'Western Bantu Expansion', *JAH*, 25 (1984), pp 129-131.

²⁶¹ This periodisation is according to lexicostatistical analysis of Bantu languages in Anita Pfouts, 'Economy and Society in pre-colonial Namibia - a linguistic approach', in Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, p 121. Precise dating remains uncertain, in the absence of archaeological corroboration. Denbow, 'Congo to Kalahari', p 143.

²⁶² Pfouts, 'Economy', p 121.

²⁶³ For a discussion of the origins of the name Ovambo see Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 53-7.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 58-9, 76 and 78.

²⁶⁵ Petrus Amutenya, 'Omizalo dhaakulyenale aawambo' translated by Escher Luanda (unpublished manuscript, Okahau, ca 1990).

²⁶⁶ Carolyn Hamilton, 'Ideology and Oral Traditions: Listening to the Voices 'From Below'', *History in Africa*, 14 (1987), p 68.

about how the Ovambo viewed their origins. This was heavily contested ideological terrain between competing groups within society.²⁶⁷

Discourse on centralisation by ruling groups and their attempts at ideological legitimation appear in a wide range of traditions of origin in the eastern Ovambo polities. In very simplistic terms, accounts of the settlement of different areas of the floodplain by the Kwanyama, Ndonga, Kwambi and Ngandjera, and sub-groups of these nuclei,²⁶⁸ provided these polities with progenitors from whom ruling groups could claim descent.²⁶⁹ The theme of royal centralisation in traditions is taken further in the genealogical detail provided in Kwanyama testimony such as Kaulinge's,²⁷⁰ which builds what Vansina terms a 'cumulative account'.²⁷¹

Kwanyama oral traditions collected in the early twentieth century revealed competition between cultivators and pastoralists, and between generations. These were 'harmonised' under a ruling lineage.²⁷² Despite the latter's dominance in the tradition, lineage interests as against centralised royal power were by no means completely submerged. Though it is not possible here, further 'unpacking' of these traditions would prove rewarding. As Hamilton argues, 'oral traditions have the potential to reveal the history, not only of societies' rulers, but also of the ruled'.²⁷³

²⁶⁷ See Hamilton's analysis of 'voices from below' in Zulu traditions of origin. *Ibid.*, pp 67-86.

²⁶⁸ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, 'Einwanderung bis zur Gründung der einzelnen Stämme,'* ca 1901-13; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 367; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 61-7.

²⁶⁹ Williams' analysis implies that in the Kwanyama case new settlers under these progenitors became dominant over earlier farming groups and grafted on new political institutions to earlier social formations. Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 62 and 74.

²⁷⁰ See Appendix 7 for both critical remarks and a transcription of Kaulinge's oral testimony.

²⁷¹ Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p 24. A similar 'cumulative account' appears in Petrus Amutenya's Ngandjera history, 'Omizalo dhaakulyenale aawambo', translated by Escher Luanda (unpublished manuscript, Okahau, ca 1990).

²⁷² AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, 'Einwanderung bis zur Gründung der einzelnen Stämme,'* ca 1901-13; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 369-70.

²⁷³ Hamilton, 'Ideology and Oral Traditions', p 74.

In contrast with the centralised traditions of the east, oral traditions from Ombalantu which filtered through their neighbours and were recorded in the late nineteenth century recount the failure of the central political institution and the fall of their last king, Kamahu.²⁷⁴ These Mbalantu traditions show the success of lineage decentralisation of power.²⁷⁵ Lineage ideology superseded royal ideology in oral tradition. The character of Mbalantu oral tradition probably changed as well, crossing over to the kind of oral traditions common in less centralised societies such as the Bemba, of whom Roberts wrote:

there are no traditions of Bemba history as such; there are only histories of various groups and positions in Bemba society... Thus, to find out what the Bemba may have done in the past, one must consult a great many people all over the country.²⁷⁶

If 'cumulative accounts' survive from post-Kamahu Ombalantu, they will obviously not be royal genealogies.²⁷⁷

Religion and culture

In the 1880s, a religious imagination that was multi-faceted and eclectic coincided with the complex origins of the Ovambo. It was fed by practices and beliefs which were either muted or reinforced accretions from external contacts, both ancient and recent. The uneven nature of source material dictates great caution in evaluating this most elusive aspect of Ovambo

²⁷⁴ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 136; Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 107.

²⁷⁵ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989; interview with Modestus Andowa, Anamulenge, 4.11.1989.

²⁷⁶ Andrew D. Roberts, *A History of the Bemba. Political growth and change in north-eastern Zambia before 1900* (London, 1973), p 12.

²⁷⁷ Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, p 24.

cultural life in the last century.²⁷⁸ No set of religious beliefs appeared to become systematic within any single polity, nor across Ovamboland as a whole. But it is certain that most Ovambo communities shared a number of common religious beliefs.

The most important shared belief was in a single deity, Kalunga.

Kalunga was regarded as a helper in times of danger and as a last resort in times of need... Kalunga represented the inexplicable power both as far as good and evil were concerned.²⁷⁹

Aarni argues that the Ovambo concept of Kalunga had become unique, distinct from those neighbouring communities who shared belief in a single deity.²⁸⁰ Unlike the Tshokwe in Angola who represented Kalunga in carved wooden figures, Kalunga for the Ovambo was non-iconic.²⁸¹ His name was associated with the idea of immensity and inexplicable mystery, as reflected in the description of the sea as *omulonga wa Kalunga*, the river of God.²⁸²

Kalunga had many other names,²⁸³ suggesting his multi-faceted character. Estermann judged this belief in Kalunga to be a 'very recognisable monotheistic belief', which later allowed missionaries 'to graft upon it, without great violence, the notion of a revealed God.'²⁸⁴ Ovambo legends did not record that Kalunga created the universe, though he created the first

²⁷⁸ The main sources are Warneck, 'Studien zur Religion', pp 313-30; Teddy Aarni, *The Kalunga concept in Ovambo religion from 1870 onwards* (Stockholm, 1982); Maija Hiltunen, *Witchcraft and Sorcery in Ovambo* (Helsinki, 1986). See also Galton, *Narrative*, p 226, concerning Ovambo reserve about revealing their religious beliefs.

²⁷⁹ Aarni, *Kalunga concept*, pp 122-123.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p 98.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p 107.

²⁸² Carlos Estermann, *Ethnography of South-West Angola* (New York, 1976), Vol 1, p 182.

²⁸³ Brincker's study of Kwanyama religious beliefs relates a legend concerning Kalunga carrying two baskets and dispensing good and bad fortune, which is almost identical to that of the Ndembu people, in whose legend the deity is named Pamba. P.H. Brincker, *Unsere Ovambo-Mission sowie Land, Leute, Religion, Sitten, Gebräuche, Sprache usw. der Ovakuanjama-Ovambo, und Mitteilungen unsere Ovambo-Missionare zusammengestellt* (Barmen, 1900), p 38.

²⁸⁴ Estermann, *Ethnography* Vol 1, p 189.

ancestors. Kalunga never became the focus of a cult. He had no shrine, no priests, and there were no pictorial or material representations of him.²⁸⁵

There was no need for the Ovambos to offer sacrifices to Kalunga, because he was too far away and lacked for nothing. When the harvest was plentiful, it was the sign that Kalunga had not forgotten the people. When the tribe was visited by pestilence, it was the hand of Kalunga, and no offerings could help. Therefore it was not Kalunga who was the object of the Ovambo's worship. The sacrifices were offered and addressed to their *oohe nooyina* and *aathithi*.²⁸⁶

The second sphere of shared belief among the Ovambo was the connection between the spirits of ancestors - *ovakwamungu* - and their living descendants. There was a continuity after death which could not be broken. Ancestors were thought to have a functional role in the world of the living for as many generations as they were remembered, and could be a force for both good and evil. It was an 'ambivalent and diffuse' relationship.²⁸⁷ Ovambo considered that both their cattle and their land were the heritage from their ancestors, who in their view were also able to influence rainfall.²⁸⁸ Obligatory offerings to the spirits of the dead were made by each *eumbo* on three distinct occasions: when the first porridge was prepared from the new millet or sorghum harvest, the first beer brewed from the new grain, and at the harvesting of the first *ongongo* fruit.²⁸⁹ When the need arose to placate the anger of a spirit who had avenged himself by causing the illness of a close kin member, the sacrifice of a domestic animal - either cock, goat, dog or ox - was undertaken.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Warneck, 'Studien zur Religion', p 315.

²⁸⁶ Aarni, *Kalunga concept*, p 73. These terms for the ancestral spirits are in oshiNdonga, signifying the remembered spirits and a generic term respectively; the relevant oshiKwanyama term for ancestral spirits is *ovakwamungu*, which will be employed here.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p 63.

²⁸⁸ Aarni, *Kalunga concept*, p 64.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 46.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Belief in witchcraft and sorcery was a third common feature of Ovambo religious outlook. This constituted the most widespread explanation of the causation of evil. As this body of knowledge was paralleled by a set of remedial measures, it gave a measure of human control in situations of powerlessness in the face of chance and natural happenings. There was a clear distinction between witches (*ovalodhi*) and sorcerers (*ovatikili*). The witch's power was believed to be inherent; he or she worked involuntarily, without being aware of the ability.²⁹¹ No rites or medicines were used, and the services of a witch could not be bought. The power of witchcraft was triggered by strong negative emotions, such as envy or jealousy. Witchcraft accusations were made almost routinely in the case of death of a head of household.²⁹²

Where witches were accused, the concerned parties needed the king's permission to execute the culprit, and a payment of one head of cattle was necessary. The king could halt proceedings, or employ his own diviners to test the veracity of the accusation, especially if appealed to by the family of the accused. Some kings did not favour high rates of witchcraft accusation and attempted to curb it. Efforts to do so were made by Weyulu ya Hedimbi in the 1880s, but witch killings continued surreptitiously and he dropped his opposition.²⁹³ If found guilty, the witch was killed or, as became more common with the increase in external trade, sold to Angolan slave traders, either in the vicinity or in neighbouring Onkhumbi.²⁹⁴ Witchcraft accusations affected whole kin groups, who likewise had no future in the area.²⁹⁵ This was a large cause of emigration from the various Ovambo polities.²⁹⁶ In Ondonga

²⁹¹ Hiltunen, *Witchcraft*, p 27.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p 12.

²⁹³ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 45.

²⁹⁴ The diary of Martti Rautanen contains many references to witchcraft accusations. For the sale of 'witches' to slave dealers, see Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 24.7.1887 and 3.2.1894.

²⁹⁵ AVEM c/k 22 No 3, Wulfhorst, Schihepo und Schalulange, ca 1910-33.

²⁹⁶ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick auf 25 Jahre und auf 100 Jahre Arbeit im Ovamboland, 1917, pp 29-78 passim; Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, passim; AHU, Companhia de Mossamedes, No Vermelho 9, Chefe do Humbe - ?, 5.1.1896.

victims of witchcraft accusations began taking refuge in the Finnish missions.²⁹⁷ Estimates of witchcraft accusations suggest that numbers were high, though these were collected later, and were probably exaggerated.²⁹⁸ Deaths of kings and members of the royal family, and to a lesser extent *omalenga*, led to particularly large numbers of witchcraft accusations.²⁹⁹

Sorcery, as distinct from witchcraft, was believed to be the deliberate use of magical techniques to cause injury and misfortune to health and property.³⁰⁰ Sorcerers (*ovatikili*) had no inherent powers and were instructed in their skills by other sorcerers. They employed magical rites and medicines, and their services could be bought. They could employ curses which affected the victim and his or her kin over the long term, but such curses could be removed by other specialist *ovatikili*.³⁰¹ The most powerful Kwanyama sorcerers operated in the utmost secrecy and were invested by the renowned Ngangela practitioners.³⁰²

Those with power to detect witches and sorcerers through a variety of magic means and rites were the diviners (s. *ondudu*, pl. *eendudu*).³⁰³ Male diviners favoured the knife as the instrument to detect malefactors.³⁰⁴ Female diviners most commonly used ashes to do so. The *omakola*, a notched bow attached to two gourds, was a musical instrument 'exclusively' employed by women diviners. Many possessors of the *omakola*, functioning in the role of female diviners, were in fact *omasenge* (homosexuals) who dressed as women

²⁹⁷ Hiltunen, *Witchcraft*, p 90.

²⁹⁸ Selma Rainio, first mission doctor in Ovamboland, quoted in Hiltunen, *Witchcraft*, p 31. She judged approximately 730 were executed per year in pre-colonial Ondonga; and Estermann (*Ethnography* Vol 1, p 203) estimated over a thousand annually in Oukwanyama.

²⁹⁹ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, pp 28-9; c/k 22 No 4, 'Haschipala', ca 1910-33; Hiltunen, *Witchcraft*, p 91.

³⁰⁰ Hiltunen, *Witchcraft*, p 27.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p 106.

³⁰² Estermann, *Ethnography* Vol 1, p 200.

³⁰³ Hiltunen, *Witchcraft*, p 28.

³⁰⁴ Aarni, *Kalunga concept*, p 49.

and even contracted marriage. An *esenge* was held to have been possessed by a female spirit since childhood.³⁰⁵

It was believed that a diviner entered this practice because among his or her ancestors was an *ondudu* whose spirit caused an illness, which persisted until the ailing person consented to serve the *ondudu* spirit as a medium. The prospective diviner was then subjected to a complex set of initiation procedures, presided over by a master *ondudu*. If candidates failed in the divination tests, they could still serve as healers to cure the sick and exorcise evil spirits. The master *ondudu* also taught the curative properties of certain plants.³⁰⁶

There existed in fact a multiplicity of healers in the Ovambo communities, which contributed to a fourth dimension of shared magico-religious beliefs. Medicines could be obtained not only to harm enemies, but to protect against ill-wishers. Medicines and spells were sought by newly married women to ensure fertility. A number of ritual measures connected with fertility were common knowledge; mothers employed these when their daughters reached puberty.³⁰⁷ The *efundula* (female initiation) rites included several features designed to enhance fertility.³⁰⁸ Another important area of medical belief was the use of herbs and magic to ensure safety and victory in war. Magical powers were developed by the turn of the century which offered resistance to bullets and skills in marksmanship, which complemented the older magical power of raising a strong wind which aided attacks on enemy targets.³⁰⁹

Rainmaking was a crucial area of Ovambo religious practice. Most Ovambo kingships shared the practice of sending a sacrificial black ox to Evale when serious drought threatened. The Vale king performed the sacrifice

³⁰⁵ Estermann, *Ethnography* Vol 1, p 197.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Vol 1, p 193.

³⁰⁷ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

³⁰⁸ Tuupainen, *Marriage*, p 48.

³⁰⁹ Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, p 225.

with each offering from his royal neighbours. The crucial element of the ritual was the killing of the beast over the grave of the late king, Nambinga, whose spirit continued to exercise rainmaking powers.³¹⁰ But there were also independent rainmakers who came from the same clan as Nambungu, the Ovakwanelamba, which points to the existence of a wider rainmaking cult.

Religious discrepancies may have existed among Ovambo polities in the sphere of royal interventions. Kingly intervention, such as in the agricultural cycle, was probably more common in the larger, more powerful polities such as Ondonga and Oukwanyama than in western Ovamboland. Certainly more has been written about the concept of divine kingship, kings sharing the attributes of Kalunga, and the sacred blood of royals which no commoner could shed, in the bigger eastern polities.³¹¹ It is not clear, however, whether the religious functions of kings in these eastern polities were more numerous or merely better known to outside observers. The extent to which the relatively decentralised western polities might have had their religious practices dominated by lineage heads rather than kings remains under-researched.

Royal pre-eminence in eastern polities was based to some degree on the influence attributed to kings' ancestors over the welfare of the country, *oshilongo*.³¹² Their importance was illustrated by the special shrines at the graves of dead kings. These were modest, pyramid-like mopane pole structures propped up by stakes, called *ompampa*. The *ompampa* was a sacred

³¹⁰ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1901-13; Estermann, *Ethnography* Vol 1, p 192. For a demystified version of this belief in Vale rain-making, see interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 26.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 169-73).

³¹¹ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1901-13; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 41-9. See also Marta Salokoski, 'Symbolic world and social structure. An analysis of the power basis of Ovambo kingships in pre-colonial and colonial Ovambo' (Licentiate thesis, University of Helsinki, 1988).

³¹² AVEM c/k 7 No 9, Sckär, Beitrag zur den Sitten und Gebräuchen der Ovakuanjama, 1899.

place, but also offered asylum for the criminal or persecuted, even fugitives from other communities.³¹³

Though specific to the eastern kingships, the *okakulukadhi* performed a similar function as a refuge for the criminal and the oppressed. These were the places in the forests between Ondonga, Oukwanyama and Uukwambi where 'blood-peace' had been ritually marked between representatives of the respective kings. In the forest area between Oukwanyama and Ondonga at Ondugulugu in 1891, a black cow had been sacrificed to mark the Ndonga-Kwanyama 'blood-peace'. 'It symbolised peace and the sweeping away of blood. It was all done during the reign of King Weyulu and Kambonde ka Mpingana'.³¹⁴ A similar blood-peace had been reached by the kings of Ondonga and Uukwambi in 1868,³¹⁵ marked by the sacrifice of a cow at Omagonzati, a place which also offered sanctuary. Wayfarers entering the *okakulukadhi* were obliged to leave offerings of grain for ancestral spirits believed to reside there.³¹⁶

It is appropriate to conclude this overview of the Ovambo religious imagination with emphasis on two aspects of the 'techniques of culture' that characterised the floodplain communities. There certainly existed a wealth of ritual supporting every productive activity of family and community, and each significant benchmark in the life of the individual, detail of which is plentiful.³¹⁷ While most of these showed cultural similarities between the

³¹³ Aarni, *Kalunga concept*, p 82; August Wulffhorst, *Von Hexen und Zauberern. Bilder aus dem Leben der heidnischen Amboleute in Süd-West-Afrika* (Wuppertal-Barmen, 1935), p 8; Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 234, for a photograph of the *ompampa* of Mandume ya Ndemufayo.

³¹⁴ Petrus Amutenya, 'Okakulukadhi' translated by Escher Luanda (unpublished manuscript, Okahau, ca 1990); AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13. There is disagreement as to dates of this blood-peace, but Finnish sources quoted by Siiskonen give 1891 as the date. See Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 209.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ Useful sources include AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13; Hahn, Vedder and Fourie, *Native Tribes*; Vedder, *South West Africa*; Tönjes, *Ovamboland*; Brincker, *Unsere Ovambo-Mission*; Estermann, *Ethnography* Vol 1; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*.

disparate Ovambo polities, the most striking in terms of social organisation were the male circumcision, *ethanda*, and the *efundula* (called *ohango* south of Oukwanyama).

Male circumcision, since its abolition in the bigger polities around the mid-nineteenth century, began to fade throughout the floodplain. The last of the tenacious western communities, the Mbalantu, 'officially' ceased the practice in 1924, but only after missionary pressure forced the colonial authorities to take action.³¹⁸ From there the practice retreated into secret pockets across the border in Angola.³¹⁹ However, while the pattern of ending circumcision took hold, vestigial privileges for circumcised men remained in force for a long period. They were men in demand for many ritual activities. An example of this persistence was the prohibition on uncircumcised kings from entering the vicinity of any former king's *embala*.³²⁰

Another need arose from the female initiation ceremony, the *efundula*, whose chief initiator was male, and circumcised.³²¹ *Efundula* varied in duration from one polity to the next, and obviously in scale, but unlike male circumcision it was an extremely vibrant institution in the 1880s.³²² Kings decided the date of *efundula* ceremonies and presided over their inauguration and conclusion. Each woman who had attained puberty was a participant. Many were already bespoken as brides, to be claimed by husbands approved by their families at their successful completion of all stages of the *efundula*. No young woman could marry without having passed through the *efundula*. The ceremonies included gruelling tests of physical endurance, with initiates pounding grain for long hours when the sun was at its highest. This was

³¹⁸ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989.

³¹⁹ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 236.

³²⁰ Auala ELCIN Archive Z III 2, Wulforst, *Chronik der Station Omupanda*, 1915.

³²¹ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 244.

³²² For studies of *efundula* in more recent periods, see Tuupainen, *Marriage*; Gwyneth Davies, 'The Efundula: Fertility and Social Maturity among the Kuanyama of Southern Angola' (MA thesis, University of Kent, 1987); Powell-Cotton Museum, D. and A. Powell-Cotton, 1937a, 'The Efundula: Engagement and Marriage'.

intended to flush out pregnant participants, who by the 1880s were no longer everywhere burnt alive but were still sent away to disgrace and punishment.³²³ After the pounding, a phase of dancing and feasting ensued with the full participation of the women of the community, who led the songs containing many social lessons for the initiates now entering full womanhood. Special drummers played on this occasion, except in Uukwambi where drums were not used.³²⁴ All phases of the *efundula* were marked by changes in dress and hairstyle of the girls, none more striking than the penultimate stage in which the initiates smeared themselves with ash, dressed in spine-leaved skirts, and roamed the district in bands exercising their temporary prerogative to demand food from any household and to beat any man they encountered.³²⁵

Potent fertility medicines were a ritual part of *efundula* and were offered by the 'master of ceremonies', a circumcised man. Such rites consistently aroused the greatest element of missionary opposition to *efundula*, which became the central ground on which Ovambo traditionalists fought incoming pietist missionaries.³²⁶

³²³ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus, ca 1901-13. Pregnancy prior to *efundula* was a common cause of suicide among young women. Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 258.

³²⁴ Interview with Sister Credula Uugwanga, Oshikuku, 6.7.1989.

³²⁵ See Davies, 'Efundula'; Tuupainen, *Marriage*, pp 45-50; Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, pp 135-42; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 243- 51.

³²⁶ AVEM c/k 7 No 18, Welsch, Die Forderung des Oberhäuptlings Mandume betr Efundula und die unsern Gemeinden deraus erwachsen, 1914; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 244.

CHAPTER 3

THE IMPACT OF MERCHANT CAPITAL

Merchant capital preceded the colonial division of the south-west African hinterland by some decades. The Berlin agreements of 1884 placed the coastline between the Orange and the Kunene rivers under German colonial jurisdiction. The remnants of Portugal's trading empire of three centuries earlier - Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea Bissau, São Tomé and Príncipe and Mozambique - were formalised into colonies.¹ Finally, Germany and Portugal signed a bilateral treaty in 1886 delimiting the boundary between Angola and German South West Africa (GSWA).² These agreements incorporated Ovamboland into both German and Portuguese empires.

Despite these formulations, actual 'colonisation' of Angola and GSWA occurred in gradual stages. For Portugal, this entailed campaigns of military occupation; by 1900 her presence had been established in the Nkhumbi polity across the Kunene from Ovamboland.³ For Germany, preoccupied with establishing a settler colony in central and southern Namibia, Ovamboland was too distant and formidable to have had more than exploratory visits by officials by the turn of the century.⁴ The international legal agreements partitioning Africa by imperial nations had no immediate effects for the remote floodplain polities, though it was the start of a net closing.

¹ Barry Munslow, *Mozambique: the Revolution and its Origins* (London, 1983), p 5.

² E. Hertslet, *The Map of Africa by Treaty* (3rd edition, London, 1909), 3 vols, Vol II, pp 703-5. The remaining borders of German South West Africa were clarified in the Anglo-German Agreement of July 1890. This also provided Germany's colony with free access to the Zambezi river by means of the Caprivi Strip, a corridor some twenty miles wide in the north east corner of the country. *Ibid.*, pp 901-2.

³ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 425-442.

⁴ Initial visits were by von Estorff in 1898 and Franke in 1899. F. Rudolf Lehmann, 'Die politische und soziale Stellung der Häuptlinge im Ovambo-land während der deutschen Schutzherrschaft in Südwest-Afrika', *Tribus: Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, Band 4/5, 1954/5, p 269; NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 10.11.1899.

Of far greater impact was the penetration of merchant capital. The latter was particularly intensive from the 1880s, though it had a very long genesis, especially in Angola.

Overview of mercantile frontiers

Ovamboland was situated on the advancing frontiers of two separate mercantile systems. One epicentre was located in the Cape peninsula,⁵ which by the 1850s was using Walvis Bay as a conduit into south-western Africa.⁶ By the 1860s Ovamboland was one of the more remote subcontinental regions to be incorporated into the mercantile economy centred on the Cape.

The second epicentre was located in Angola. This had its roots in four centuries of Portuguese intervention in west central Africa, from their settled footholds on the coast. Luanda had been in operation as a harbour since 1576 and Benguela since 1617.⁷ Although the Ovambo were not directly involved in the Portuguese slave trade until the 1850s, its indirect impact reached them much earlier. Over the three centuries of the Angolan slave trade, regions directly involved in slaving underwent a series of transformations. As Miller argues, over time this resembled a 'moving frontier of slaving violence'⁸ which left behind it commercialised areas under *régimes* orientated towards the Atlantic trade. Miller depicts the areas beyond the frontiers of violence as geographical zones and transitional periods, where 'initial recipients of imported goods had acquired enough dependents to overwhelm older institutions but had not yet spread imports in sufficient quantities to bring

⁵ See Colin Bundy, *The rise and fall of the South African peasantry*, 2nd edition (London, 1988), p 29, for a discussion of the spread of this market economy from the Cape.

⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 107.

⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 89.

⁸ Miller, *Way of death*, p 140.

social and political order based on debt out of the chaos.⁹ Once the latter process was completed, states were reconstructed on the basis of mercantile principles. However, the pattern differed on the extremities such as the far south. Societies to the north of Ovamboland were directly affected,¹⁰ but the floodplain itself sustained only a diffused impact. Miller argues generally that agro-pastoralists of the lower Kunene floodplain sufficiently limited the quantities of goods they received to forestall the advance of the slaving frontier. Since their herds gave them the means to create clients by lending stock, they could assimilate the imports through established patron-client networks of exchange. Pressures from foreign traders and the inflated exchange networks they brought everywhere else in central Africa arose in the floodplain only after 1850.¹¹ There is not the space here to fully explore Miller's analysis, but the reasons for the floodplain's isolation were probably more multi-faceted than Miller suggests. Possibly the relatively late centralisation of Ovambo states¹² and geographical remoteness contributed to their marginality.

The slaving frontier did not make inroads into Ovamboland before 1850. But the slave trade infrastructure in central and southern Angola with its transport routes and *entrepôts* provided the foundation for Ovambo incorporation into the Angolan mercantile system, characterised by a *mélange* of slave, arms and alcohol dealing.¹³ This same infrastructure retained its resilience into the twentieth century, long after the Portuguese launched their attempts to suppress trade in slaves and arms.¹⁴

By the 1850s, when long-distance networks began to probe Ovamboland, the floodplain polities were relatively isolated and self-

⁹ *Ibid.*, p 140.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp 150-1 and 167.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p 147.

¹² The suggestion emerges from Miller's account that more centralised societies tended to become prominent in the slave trade. *Ibid.*, pp 141 and 146.

¹³ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 16.8.1904.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

contained, their local and regional trade networks paramount. Local trade was vigorous between the different Ovambo polities, as was regional trade with Herero and San.¹⁵ There was limited contact with the Ovimbundu, who probably traded Ovambo ivory for cattle and glass beads after the 1840s. Because Ovimbundu traded this ivory with the Portuguese, this was the first indirect Ovambo contact with the European long-distance trade.¹⁶

Although oral traditions maintain that white traders only entered Oukwanyama from the north in the reign of Mweshipandeka (1861-81),¹⁷ the educated *sertanejo*¹⁸ Bernadino Brochado had trade dealings with the Kwanyama king Mweshipandeka's predecessor Haimbili (ca 1811-59)¹⁹ in 1850.²⁰ Francis Galton and Charles Andersson visited Ondonga from the south in 1851.²¹ It was represented in travelogue literature as a 'scientific' exploration, but their intention was to open up the route to trade.²² This first exploratory visit from the south was indicative of the growing mercantile importance of Walvis Bay as an offshoot of Cape trade. Previously Walvis Bay had serviced whaling and guano vessels and a limited cattle exchange had developed with Nama groups near this area of coast.²³ The peak of Atlantic whaling off the Namibian coast was in the 1770s and 1780s; guano was intensively exploited in the 1840s until stocks were exhausted.²⁴ Since the mouth of the Kunene was inaccessible to ships, and the coastline except for

¹⁵ Galton, *Narrative*, pp 179 and 228.

¹⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 90.

¹⁷ UVEM c/k 22, Wulfhorst, 'Kaukungwa', (ca 1910-33); interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 36-7); Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 27.

¹⁸ *Sertanejo* is derived from the Portuguese term *sertão*, best translated by the English word 'bush'; *sertanejos* were typically backwoods traders.

¹⁹ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 23.

²⁰ B.J. Brochado, 'Descrição'; AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Renseignements sur l'Ovampo et le Kaoko, ca 1880-84; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 61; Clarence-Smith, 'Angolan Connection', p 172.

²¹ See Galton, *Narrative*, and Charles John Andersson, *Notes of Travel in South Africa* (London, 1875).

²² Haarhoff, *Wild South-West*, pp 38-41.

²³ Alan D. Cooper, *U.S. Economic Power and Political Influence in Namibia* (Boulder, 1982), p 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

Walvis Bay and Angra Pequena (later Luderitzbucht) impenetrable by grace of the Namib desert, Walvis Bay now served mainly as an *entrée* to the interior for traders from the Cape.

Merchant capital on the peripheries of Ovamboland

As merchant capital expanded, powerful changes centred on the Cape sent shudders up through the south west. Hunters, traders and missionaries, whose respective functions often became blurred, used Walvis Bay as a supply source and probed north to Ovamboland, Kavango and Lake Ngami.²⁵ From 1800 the Nama migrations from the Cape had a great impact in the region.²⁶ Finally, a Boer exodus which included the Thirstland trekkers who first settled briefly in Kaokoland,²⁷ then permanently in Humpata under nominal Portuguese sovereignty,²⁸ was indicative of the widening sub-continental impact of merchant capital. After initial engagements with Ovambo polities²⁹ these groups all settled on the peripheries of the floodplain. This had complex interactive effects in the whole region.

Tim Keegan argues that early forms of accumulation were not racially exclusive processes.³⁰ Examples of this are very striking in the southern Angolan theatre. Firstly, within the ranks of early long-distance hunters and

²⁵ See Edward C. Tabler, *Pioneers of South West Africa and Ngamiland, 1738-1880* (Cape Town, 1973), for detailed outlines of white travellers and settlers in this period.

²⁶ See Lau, 'Conflict and Power'; idem, 'The Kommando in Southern Namibia 1800-1870.'

²⁷ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, 'Notes sur les Kaoko', ca 1880; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 417-8.

²⁸ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, passim.

²⁹ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet 'Notes sur les Kaoko', ca 1880; AVEM c/k 22 No 8, Wulfhorst, *Was uns die Geschichte d. Rh MG erzählt insbes von SW Afrika* (ca 1891-1936); AHU 1R 15P, *Governador de Mossamedes - Governador Geral*, 4.1.1894; AGCSSp 466-VI, Duparquet - TRP, 23.7.1881; AGCSSp 466-D-IV, Duparquet, *Voyage dans l'Ovampo*, 29.3.1881.

³⁰ Tim Keegan, 'Debate. The Origins of Agrarian Capitalism in South Africa: A Reply', *JSAS*, Vol 15, No 4, October 1989, p 671.

traders was one black hunter, of Zulu origin, known only as 'January'.³¹ He hunted many years in Damaraland and followed the tusk frontier into Angola.³² There were also several hunters and traders of mixed race.³³ However, the black accumulators of real significance were the Nama commandos. Pélissier asserts that the 'Hottentots' arrived in southern Angola in the train of Boer trekkers in 1881.³⁴ In fact, their first forays into Ovamboland came in the late 1850s,³⁵ but after numerous raiding seasons they discontinued.³⁶ In the 1880s Petrus Zwaartbooi, a lesser Nama warlord, and his followers shifted their base from central SWA to Zessfontein in Kaoko, and began raiding across the Kunene.³⁷ The main crossing point on the Kunene was named Swaartbooisdrift after this commando.³⁸ The apogee of Nama raiding in southern Angola came in the mid-1880s, meeting little resistance from the Portuguese.

The Hottentots living in the Kaokoveld raided the South of Angola and advanced as far as the plantations in the river Bero within sight of Mossamedes taking whatever suited them, and when the news of their proximity became known in that town the inhabitants fled... it being well known to them that the few black soldiers at the post dared not go out to meet the raiders who would have simply overpowered them.³⁹

The local trader William Chapman saw it as symptomatic of the weak state of Portuguese colonialism in Angola that a Portuguese official deflected the

³¹ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, p 72.

³² January in fact died fighting with Portuguese irregular units against Nkhumbi and Mbandja rebels in 1891. See NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 37; also AHU 1R 12P, *Chronica das Missões*, March 1895.

³³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, pp 72 and 109.

³⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 420.

³⁵ Brigitte Lau (ed.), *Hugo Hahn Tügebücher, 1838-1860*, Part III (Windhoek, 1984-5), p 598.

³⁶ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet - TRP, 29.3.1880; AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, 'Projet d'organisation', 25.5.1880; Tabler (ed.), *Travels Part 1*, pp 194, 214, 236 and 239.

³⁷ Earl of Mayo, 'A Journey from Mossamedes to the River Cunene, South West Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, 1883, Vol 5, pp 458-73.

³⁸ NAN ZBU JXIII B3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901.

³⁹ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 39.

Nama from attacking white residents of Chibia with the offer of a free rein to raid villages outside the settlement.⁴⁰ Equally significant was the fact that the only force to tackle them decisively was a Boer commando in 1891,⁴¹ causing the Nama to refrain from further attacks in the areas close to white settlement.⁴²

Chapman alleged that Boer settlers often reached local agreements with Nama raiders in later years, allowing them to raid African villages unimpeded in the Chella foothills, in return for tribute paid in stolen cattle.⁴³ The degree of independence of Zwaartbooï's Nama from Witbooï's control in SWA is uncertain, as is the question of supply of arms between the two. It is possible that when German colonial control was finally exercised over Witbooï, arms supply may have dried up to the northern commandos.⁴⁴ Whatever its usual source, ammunition certainly became very scarce for the commandos, who in 1887 were reported to have fallen on hard times and were frequently without a bullet between them.⁴⁵ Nonetheless raids continued into the 1890s - rumours and alarms were ever-present, though Zwaartbooï himself was last documented as active in 1888.⁴⁶

The Zwaartbooï Nama did not actually raid in Ovamboland to any significant degree. The interaction between armed and mounted Nama groups and the Ovambo polities was more complex than is possible to render here. Duparquet noted that there had been a withdrawal of Nama groups from Ovamboland, probably due to malaria, to which the Nama seemed particularly susceptible.⁴⁷ The importance of the Nama was specifically as

⁴⁰ Ibid., p 40.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., pp 41-2.

⁴³ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin (1895), p 49.

⁴⁴ The Portuguese even accused their German neighbours of providing the Nama commandos with white commanders. AHU 2R S2 23P, Provincia - Ultramar, 1.9.1888.

⁴⁵ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Schaller - TRP, Amboellas, 3.4.1887.

⁴⁶ AHU 2R S2 23P, Andrew Pearson - Artur de Paiva, March 1888.

⁴⁷ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet - TRP, 29.3.1880; AGCSSP, 465-III, Duparquet, 'Projet d'organisation', 25.5.1880; see also NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 2.

black agents of an extremely predatory form of accumulation on the periphery of Ovamboland. It was probably not until the mid-1890s that the Kwanyama began to rival the Nama in raiding southern Angola. This meant that there had been at least ten years of Zwaartbooi depredations, which had lost African communities in southern Angola many thousands of cattle⁴⁸ and left them 'softened up' for the next wave of raiders.

The Angola Boers

Military skills of Boer fighters were harnessed within the Portuguese military interventions, as irregular units, under the command of the colonial power.⁴⁹ They assisted in the eventual colonisation of independent frontier polities, including northern Ovamboland. While marginal to the Ovambo in the 1880s, they were a significant force in the deep penetration of merchant capital into southern Angola.

As elsewhere in southern Africa, a clear view is gained of the 'pre-history' of capitalism in the activities of Boer accumulators who operated alongside independent black peoples in the interior regions.⁵⁰ Here too there was much surplus appropriation, tribute-taking, mercantile enterprise and even looting, though this was not unrestrained.⁵¹ Boer initiative in southern Angola was greatly fettered by discriminatory policies operated by Portuguese officials, who feared that Boer aggrandisement would undermine Portuguese imperialist goals.⁵² Whereas in the Transvaal Boers controlled

⁴⁸ AHU 2R 2S 18P, Governador de Mossamedes - Governador Geral Luanda, 22.1.1894; AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin (1895), pp 22, 28 and 48; NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 1, pp 42-43.

⁴⁹ NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 1, pp 40-3 and 49.

⁵⁰ Keegan, 'Origins of Agrarian Capitalism', p 674.

⁵¹ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 83-4.

⁵² NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 1, p 53 et passim; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 87.

local state instruments,⁵³ in Huila province these were strictly confined to Portuguese nationals.⁵⁴ Nepotism operated, however, when opportunity allowed.⁵⁵

This frontier economy was shaped under the dominance of a merchant capital weaker than in most other parts of southern Africa. In the context of the world capitalist economy it operated marginally and unintensively. It gave rise to an accumulating settler elite, servicing Portuguese colonialism. As will be argued later, the latter was itself a semi-colony, dependent on British capital and diplomatic support.⁵⁶

Missionaries

Missionary interests also focused on the floodplain region from the 1850s. The Rhenish Mission Society began to explore the possibility of an Ovambo mission in 1855.⁵⁷ The potential was attractive, especially in view of its 'ten fruitless years' with the Herero.⁵⁸ The missionaries ascribed many of their difficulties to the fact that the Herero and Nama were nomadic; by contrast the fertility of Ovamboland had given rise to a dense, agricultural and sedentary population.⁵⁹ Mission work, it was argued, could thrive in these conditions. This interest prompted the ill-fated journey of the Rhenish

⁵³ Keegan, 'Origins of Agrarian Capitalism', p 675.

⁵⁴ See for example NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 1, p 55.

⁵⁵ As was the case with Artur de Paiva who married into the most prominent Boer family, Botha. Paiva, as Superintendent of white settlement in the Huila highlands, made land allocations on the basis of his wife's family's connections. Great jealousy was aroused by the land allocations and jurisdiction of the Companhia de Mossamedes which cut back Paiva's sphere of influence in the south. AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, *Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin* (1895), p 22.

⁵⁶ Munslow, *Mozambique*, p 5.

⁵⁷ RMG *Berichte* 1890, p 175.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

missionaries Hugo Hahn and Johannes Rath, with the hunter Frederick Green, to Ondonga in 1857, which ended in conflict.⁶⁰

This negative encounter, and the banditry of Jonker Afrikaner, prevented any Rhenish mission moves towards the north until Hahn's second journey in 1866. This was well-received; both Ndonga and Kwanyama kings indicated their desire to have mission stations in their kingdoms.⁶¹ As the Rhenish mission was at the time over-committed with new Indian work,⁶² the task of opening the first mission in Ovambo was passed on to the strongly pietist sister church in Finland,⁶³ whose first missionaries arrived in Ondonga in 1870 and established several stations.⁶⁴ Attempts were made to open a mission in Uukwambi in 1883, but this proved abortive.⁶⁵ Finnish resources were limited and the Rhenish missionaries were tied up in Hereroland until 1890, some years after *Pax Germanica* was imposed on warring Nama and Herero groups in the south of the protectorate.⁶⁶ In 1890, however, Rhenish missionaries opened their first Kwanyama mission.⁶⁷ An attempt was made to open a mission in Ongandjera, but the Kwambi king prevented the passage of the missionaries through his territory and the initiative had to be abandoned.⁶⁸

The initial progress of the missions generally was slow and difficult.⁶⁹ It was thirteen years before the Finnish mission baptised its first convert,

⁶⁰ Hugo Hahn, 'Reise der Herren Hugo Hahn und Rath im südwestlichen Afrika, Mai bis September 1857', *Petermanns Mittheilungen*, 1859, pp 302-3; Frederick Green, Hugo Hahn and Johannes Rath, 'Account of an expedition from Damaraland to the Ovampo, in search of the River Cunene', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, Vol II, 1858; for a discussion of the incident see Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 99-100.

⁶¹ Hugo Hahn, 'Neueste deutsche Forschungen in Sudafrika', *Petermanns Mittheilungen*, 12, 1867, pp 289 and 291.

⁶² *RMG Berichte* 1890, p 175.

⁶³ Enquist, *Namibia. Land of Tears*, p 57.

⁶⁴ *RMG Berichte* 1890, p 175; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 125.

⁶⁵ Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 103-4; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 160-1.

⁶⁶ *RMG Berichte* 1890, p 175.

⁶⁷ AVEM c/i 19, Bernsmann - Deputation, 6.1.1892.

⁶⁸ AVEM c/i 19, Bernsmann, 'Anfänge', Olukonda, 1.8.1891.

⁶⁹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 125-6.

though by 1890 it claimed one hundred converts.⁷⁰ Catholic missions were also established in Ovamboland and southern Angola after 1880.⁷¹ In the 1860s the missionary-explorer Duparquet initiated the link between the Portuguese government and the French order, the *Congrégation du Saint Esprit*. The latter undertook a significant proportion of evangelisation in Portugal's African colonies.⁷² The Catholics initially hoped to establish missions in Hereroland, but the Lutherans in Omaruru engineered their expulsion in 1882.⁷³ Duparquet's enthusiasm about Ovamboland, 'a country which, by dint of its fertility, possesses a numerous and sedentary population'⁷⁴ should be seen at least in part against this background of mission rivalry in the south.

Mission interest in Ovamboland also coincided with the outbreak of the Nama-Herero war in 1880.⁷⁵ Trade with the Cape became difficult and the trade axis shifted north.⁷⁶ Duparquet was influential in this shift for he persuaded the Boer community in Kaokoland to move to southern Angola,⁷⁷ which greatly improved local transport networks.⁷⁸ The Kwanyama king Mweshipandeka gave Duparquet permission to establish a mission in Oukwanyama in 1880; the first station opened during his successor Namhadi's reign, in July 1884.⁷⁹

⁷⁰ RMG *Berichte* 1890, p 175.

⁷¹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 421.

⁷² BG XII 1881-3, p 161; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 17.

⁷³ See BG XI 1877-81; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 421.

⁷⁴ BG XI 1880, p 551.

⁷⁵ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet - TRP, 23.11.1880; Duparquet - TRP, 29.3.1880; Duparquet - TRP, 16.10.1880.

⁷⁶ BG XII 1881-3, p 161.

⁷⁷ AGCSSp 466 VI, Duparquet - TRP, 23.7.1881.

⁷⁸ AGCSSp 466-B-II, Lecomte - parents, 4.12.1884.

⁷⁹ AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet - TRP, 25.5.1880; AGCSSp 466-D-VI, Duparquet - TRP, 27.1.1884; BG XIII 1883-6, p 1054.

Direct mercantile penetration in Ovamboland

In 1860 Jonker Afrikaner led Nama commandos in the Ndonga succession struggle.⁸⁰ While Afrikaner and his adherents assisted the Ndonga king Shikongo establish his claim, they raided widely for cattle in southern Ovamboland and the exercise was a brutal but profitable one.⁸¹ Oral evidence from Oukwanyama suggests that after a pitched battle at Kokaue the Nama did not emerge victorious, despite the lack of modern weapons in Kwanyama hands.⁸² The moral of the tradition was the importance of speedy acquisition of guns and horses, in order to defend against similar ravages in the future.⁸³ From the date of the first Nama raids, the trading priority of Ovambo rulers remained consistently the acquisition of arms and ammunition.⁸⁴ When technology advanced, precision weapons were highly sought after;⁸⁵ salted horses were also prized.⁸⁶

The exchange commodity which first drew Ovambo polities into the long-distance trade in the 1850s was ivory. Angolan-based traders initiated this phase and the ensuing ivory boom of the 1860s drew numerous traders from the south.⁸⁷ By this time, most eastern and central⁸⁸ Ovambo polities had

⁸⁰ A. Wulffhorst, *Schiwesa. Ein Simeon aus den Ovambochristen* (Barmen, 1912), pp 5-6; Tabler (ed.), *Travels*, Part 1, p 214.

⁸¹ Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, pp 142-4.

⁸² Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 64). A second and similar tradition was collected earlier by Sckär: AVEM c/k 7 No 8, Sckär, *Kurze Geschichte Oukwanjama*, 1909, p 2.

⁸³ The name given to Jonker Afrikaner by the Ovambo was *Ongolo*, meaning horse, which suggests these were among the first horses seen in the floodplain. AVEM c/k 22 No 8, Wulffhorst, *Was uns die Geschichte*, ca 1910-1933; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 194-5.

⁸⁴ Andersson, *Notes of Travel*, p 230; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 101; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 194-7; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 144.

⁸⁵ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, *Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin*, p 21; Andersson, *Notes of Travel*, p 267.

⁸⁶ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 196-7.

⁸⁷ Andersson, *Notes of Travel*, p 265; Palgrave, W.C. in Cape of Good Hope Legislative Council, *Report of Mr Palgrave, Special Commissioner, of his Mission to Damaraland and Great Namaqualand* (Cape Town, 1877), pp 47-8.

⁸⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 110.

regular traders, except Ombandja, whose king refused them entry.⁸⁹ Ondonga and Uukwambi had fixed trading posts.⁹⁰

The periods of dominance by merchant capital from the south or from Angola have been charted by Siiskonen.⁹¹ Walvis Bay traders were better capitalised than Angolan; they used ox-wagons instead of porters and traded goods, especially arms, of higher quality.⁹² But when the Nama-Herero war broke out in 1880, the Cape banned firearm and ammunition imports into Walvis Bay. This led to a great decline in trade throughout the south-west African hinterland until the early 1890s.⁹³ Highly capitalised traders such as the Swede Axel Eriksson sought to substitute Mossamedes for Walvis Bay as their trade conduit to the interior.⁹⁴

A shift in the southern trade axis to the north resulted. A large movement of traders previously connected with Walvis Bay⁹⁵ was accompanied by the emigration of Boer settlers into southern Angola. Initially the hunter-trader influx produced a short-lived boost in ivory and ostrich-feather exports from southern Angola and a greater volume of arms and horses entered Ovamboland.⁹⁶ But by 1885 most game had disappeared⁹⁷ and the tusk frontier retreated into the deep interior of eastern Angola.⁹⁸ This decline in the ivory trade, combined with high duties in Mossamedes,⁹⁹ caused most settler-traders to diversify their economic activities, entering the

⁸⁹ Serton (ed.), *Travels*, p 107.

⁹⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 108-9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp 89-161 *passim*.

⁹² Palgrave in Cape of Good Hope, *Report*, p 49; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 17; Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 108; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 62.

⁹³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 136-40.

⁹⁴ This initiative was first proposed by Charles John Andersson, who died in Ovamboland in 1867. Axel Eriksson had been his *protégé*. Andersson, *Notes of Travel*, p 336; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 108-9.

⁹⁵ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 146-8; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs*

⁹⁶ NAN A 100, J. von Moltke, 'A Trader's Adventure in Ovamboland', pp 1-4; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 113.

⁹⁷ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, pp 109 and 117-8; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 134-6; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 149.

⁹⁸ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 62.

⁹⁹ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 148.

rubber trade,¹⁰⁰ working on infrastructural projects,¹⁰¹ agricultural cultivation and commando service.¹⁰²

Cattle now became the most important exchange commodity on the Ovambo floodplain. To promote the cattle trade, Eriksson pioneered the new trade route through the Kalahari to the Transvaal, but the Transvaal ban on arms trading discouraged its continued use, as did rinderpest in the late 1890s.¹⁰³

The German administration added to Cape controls on arms trading in GSWA, introducing expensive permits and licences to discourage traders, finally banning all arms dealing in 1892.¹⁰⁴ Controls were undermined to a limited extent by connections between Herero and Ndonga leaders in the late 1880s.¹⁰⁵ German regulations for the control of lungsickness facilitated the surveillance of illegal trade, but as Siiskonen argues, in overall terms the trade between Ovamboland and the south was affected more by the depletion of big game and the confused situation arising from the Nama-Herero war than by any German colonial directives. The latter were never completely effective.¹⁰⁶

Given the difficulties facing big traders such as Eriksson in Angola and the restrictions on trade from the south, Ovambo polities became increasingly enmeshed in the trade networks dominated by Portuguese-speakers. The

¹⁰⁰ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 52.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, passim. Traders such as Axel Eriksson and Chapman refused to participate in the illegal slave trade. AVEM c/k 22 No 3, Wulfhorst, 'Schihepo und Schalulange', ca 1910-33.

¹⁰³ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, *Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin* (1895), p 23; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 158-62; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 103.

¹⁰⁴ Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur*, p 249.

¹⁰⁵ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Haussleiter (RMG) - Kolonial Abteilung, 15.12.1904; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 144. Petrus Zwaartboo's career in the north began with the task of intercepting all traffic between Hereroland and Ovamboland in 1882, to prevent arms reaching the Herero which could then be used against the Nama. Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 142.

¹⁰⁶ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 16.8.1904.

latter undermined the 1887 Portuguese ban on arms entering Mossamedes¹⁰⁷ and connected Ovamboland with the illegal slave, alcohol and arms trade which was deeply embedded throughout central and southern Angola as far as the eastern borders of the colony.¹⁰⁸ The Portuguese colonial presence was too weak to control these networks; smuggling was a 'general deep-lying condition of the place and population.'¹⁰⁹

Merchant capital and the relations of exchange

The unevenness of sources makes it difficult to quantify the size of the long-distance trade into Ovamboland and rates of exchange. Prices did decrease in some instances, for example a precision rifle which cost twelve head of cattle in 1891 dropped to seven in 1895.¹¹⁰ But on the whole the terms of exchange did not favour the Ovambo. In 1895 Portuguese officials alleged that a trader in illegal arms could make a profit of 300 per cent on one trip between the coast and the interior.¹¹¹

Bigger white traders such as Eriksson could afford to extend considerable credit to Ovambo rulers. Guilmin, the commercial director of the Companhia de Mossamedes, who accompanied Eriksson to Oukwanyama in 1895, described the procedures:

Erikson had brought from the Transvaal, two years ago, 22 horses and 50 Martini rifles, which he sold on credit to the king of Quanyama, for 2000 head of cattle; Erikson's son has been in Quanyama for four months awaiting this payment, but the king, who since that time has sent out expeditions on all sides to steal

¹⁰⁷ NAN A 100, von Moltke; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 155.

¹⁰⁸ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin (1895), p 28; NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

¹⁰⁹ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

¹¹⁰ AHU 2R 2S 15P, Relatório Ramalho, 1891. Prices for horses also dropped between 1891 and 1895: Schinz, *Deutsch Südwest-Afrika*, p 298.

¹¹¹ AHU 1R 2S 13P, Governador Geral - Ultramar, 15.1.1895.

cattle, has not succeeded very well, for he could only raise 300 of that amount.

All commercial transactions are done in the same way in Quanyama; first of all one leaves the merchandise, then the buyer leaves in search of cattle to rob to pay the seller; following the seasons and circumstances, the payment of merchandise sold demands time, more or less.¹¹²

The necessity to meet creditors' demands led to greater pressure on established methods of surplus extraction, a theme to be examined later. Clarence-Smith and Moorsom rightly point out that it is not possible to assess the rate of unequal exchange simply on the basis of exchange values in the world markets. More important is to examine the bargaining power of rulers and the effect these relations of exchange had on the productive base of Ovambo societies.¹¹³

Kings had considerable bargaining power in dealing with white traders. They were able to play off rivalries between Portuguese and Cape-based traders.¹¹⁴ The latter were better able to procure the latest precision rifles unequivocally preferred by their *élite* Ovambo *clientèle*.¹¹⁵ One reason why Ovambo kings favoured the presence of missionaries was their usefulness as advisers and go-betweens in royal dealings with traders; they could also procure western commodities themselves. Pressure was exerted on missionaries themselves to trade. Finnish missionaries, initially committed to a non-trading policy,¹¹⁶ found themselves forced to engage in trade if they were to survive.¹¹⁷ Their main needs were grain, which could be obtained directly from households, and cattle, which were controlled by kings.¹¹⁸ Cattle

¹¹² AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Journal de l'Expédition de M. Guilmin (1895), p 20.

¹¹³ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 102.

¹¹⁴ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Bericht über die Reise von Dr Gerber, ca 1903-11.

¹¹⁵ NAN A 83, Charles John Andersson Diaries, vol 7, 16 April 1867; Andersson, *Notes of Travel*, p 267.

¹¹⁶ Enquist points out that Lutheran theology's privatistic, other-worldly tenets contradict any engagement in commercial transactions. See Enquist, *Namibia. Land of Tears*, p 55.

¹¹⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 129.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p 130.

purchase therefore usually necessitated the exchange of firearms.¹¹⁹ Similarly, the Spiritan policy was to redeem young slave children and educate them to become the nucleus of future Christian communities.¹²⁰ Namhadi demanded modern rifles from Duparquet for such exchanges.¹²¹

Ovambo kings also extracted 'gifts' from traders. Galton in fact was criticised by the hunter Green for allowing himself to be 'abused' by the Ndonga king Nangolo in 1851;¹²² but the fate of Green's own expedition in 1857 demonstrated the consequences of poor reciprocity for Ovambo hospitality.¹²³ Chapman maintained that the exchange of gifts between kings and traders was equitable, though some kings were more generous towards traders than others.¹²⁴

Trade occurred on a number of levels. Kings and *élites* were in a relatively strong position *vis-à-vis* traders, compared with ordinary householders. Based on such evidence as exists, it seems that terms of trade were particularly unfavourable for the less wealthy. This seems to have been especially the case with the Angolan alcohol trade. Householders frequently paid grossly inflated prices after sampling wine adulterated with strong Constantine brandy.¹²⁵ The destructive effects of the alcohol trade were visible in those parts of southern Angola which had been under Portuguese mercantile sway for some decades. Nogueira spoke of 'profound demoralisation', one of the 'sad accompaniments of more advanced societies' following on the threefold Portuguese contribution to African society:

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ AGCSSp 466-B-II, Lecomte - parents, 6.1.1885; Lecomte - CSSp, 7.3.1885; Lecomte - CSSp, 2.4.1885.

¹²¹ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885. Namhadi actually reneged on the original agreement to exchange slaves and insisted on using cattle to pay for the rifles.

¹²² Green, Hahn and Rath, 'Account of an expedition', pp 99-100.

¹²³ Ibid. Galton's view that Hahn's party showed 'scant courtesy' to the Ndonga king appears as an appended comment to the same article.

¹²⁴ NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 2.

¹²⁵ Interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 99).

aguardente, powder and the whip.¹²⁶ 'These are the unique instruments of civilisation that we, the civilised, have furnished them.'¹²⁷

The extent of trade in alcohol in southern Angola and Ovamboland is partly explained by its local production. *Aguardente* was produced cheaply from sugar cane by Brazilian immigrants in the Mossamedes district from the 1850s.¹²⁸ Popular resentment shown in Ovamboland against Portuguese traders was on occasion sparked off by grievances against the alcohol trade.¹²⁹ By contrast, trade in food products by householders with missionaries, hunters and traders was to all appearances less problematic.¹³⁰ Southern traders were seen as less exploitative by householders, at least in Ondonga.¹³¹

The internal impact of merchant capital

Since the Genoveses wrote of the 'Janus face' of merchant capital,¹³² other authors have taken up the metaphor to characterise its duality in an African context, notably Keegan.

Despite its innate conservatism, its parasitic quality, it [merchant capital] has indirectly had a revolutionary impact in reorienting, transforming, or strengthening the pre-capitalist systems it has penetrated, and in spawning new productive systems based on non-capitalist productive relationships.¹³³

¹²⁶ Nogueira, *Raça Negra*, p 270.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 24 and 49-51; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 133.

¹²⁹ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917; King Weyulu's mother's death, believed to have been caused by *aguardente*, resulted in great Kwanyama animosity towards Portuguese traders. See also interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 20.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 40-1).

¹³⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 130.

¹³¹ Interview with Thomas Kalumbu, Olukonda, 15.11.1989.

¹³² Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York, 1983), pp 4-5.

¹³³ Keegan, 'Origins of Agrarian Capitalism', p 671.

One of the most immediate effects of the penetration of merchant capital in Ovamboland was the reinforcement of kingly power. This bears out the Genoveses' argument that merchant capital was overwhelmingly conservative and fed off existing modes of production, reinforcing power structures already in place.¹³⁴ The strengths of Ovambo kings included their intelligence systems, their control of the movements of foreigners and their exaction of gifts from the latter. To this must be added their systems of internal tribute. Rulers and *élites* increased extraction from their subjects, which began the re-orientation of their economies on mercantilist principles.¹³⁵

Firearms represented an economic investment, offering greater scope for raiding expeditions.¹³⁶ Guns and horses were also the means by which kings rewarded their *omalenga* and the lieutenants who led the warbands.¹³⁷ Ox-wagons were another investment, as kings used them to store arms and for hunting expeditions.¹³⁸ Horses and guns also offered vital advantages for the future military struggles against expanding colonialism which Ovambo kings, who perceived Portuguese advances in the north-west and German approaches from the south, knew to lie ahead. Internally they also served the need to maintain political and ideological apparatuses. A minor but interesting example of this was the incorporation of guns into religious rituals.¹³⁹

But kings and *élites* were also attracted by commodities which served for conspicuous consumption or prestige.¹⁴⁰ This threw into sharper relief already existing social inequalities. By the mid-1880s, the shorter-term impact

¹³⁴ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *Fruits*, pp 4-5.

¹³⁵ AVEM c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, 'Haschipala', ca. 1910-33; AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Journal de l'Expédition de M Guilmin (1895), p 20.

¹³⁶ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 102.

¹³⁷ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 76.

¹³⁸ AGCSSp 466-D-VI, Duparquet, Relation du Père Duparquet sur son voyage dans l'Ovampo (Cimbébasie), 29.3.1881.

¹³⁹ Estermann, *Ethnography*, Vol 1, p 205; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 62.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Duparquet, 'Voyage en Cimbébasie', *Les Missions Catholiques*, Vol XIII, pp 485-6; Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, pp 103-4; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 78.

of the penetration of merchant capital was revealed in several instances of acute political destabilisation. King Namhadi subjected his own polity to such a degree of cattle confiscation to purchase arms, horses and luxury goods, that bitter antagonism was aroused.¹⁴¹ His recruitment of foreign elements and slaves as his bodyguards and the freedom he permitted them was also greatly resented.¹⁴² He had additionally brought Catholic missionaries into Oukwanyama.¹⁴³ Tension exploded dramatically in 1885. Namhadi died after a bout of brandy-drinking - the Spiritans were convinced older Kwanyama notables had poisoned him - and two missionaries were killed in the riots which followed, which effectively suspended the Catholic mission effort in Oukwanyama until 1900.¹⁴⁴ Duparquet wrote in 1885:

The real cause of the political revolution was King Namhadi ruining the country to buy European goods, luxury objects, horses, arms etc. One horse cost eighty cattle, all of which he exacted from his own subjects. If there was opposition, they were killed. It is quite true that all his predecessors and the kings of Ovambo do as much, but at least within limits. Namhadi would have finished by completely ruining the country.¹⁴⁵

Weyulu ya Hedimbi, who succeeded Namhadi in 1885,¹⁴⁶ was not as stringent on his own people in Oukwanyama.

Another 'palace revolution' had occurred in Uukwambi in 1875. It was said of the previous king Nuyoma by the trader McKiernan:

Niomi was a tyrant of the worst description, and impoverished his people by trading their cattle, ivory and feathers for all manner of things useless to him, from fiddles to wagons.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.6.1885.

¹⁴² AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885.

¹⁴³ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.6.1885.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*; interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 37 and 65); interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 88-9); NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 27.

¹⁴⁵ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.8.1885.

¹⁴⁶ AGCSSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 1.7.1885.

¹⁴⁷ Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 103.

His regicide and usurper Negumbo reversed the process set in motion by his predecessor. Negumbo, commented McKiernan, by contrast 'trades but little, and the stock of the country is fast increasing'.¹⁴⁸

Following these initial sharp instances of political instability, the impact of long-distance trade continued less dramatically but no less profoundly. In the long term, three important consequences developed from the debt-dominated trading process in Oukwanyama. Firstly, the institution of cattle-gifts to the king (*okasava*) was abused until it became indistinguishable from arbitrary exaction.¹⁴⁹ Oral history suggests - with some retrospective idealisation perhaps - that *okasava* was ideally a gift of cattle from a household to the king on his request, usually for purposes of hospitality.¹⁵⁰ It arguably fed into a system of redistribution. It implied compliance - however grudging - on the part of the broad population. Under new pressures, the process crumbled. Far more cattle were 'requisitioned', punishment of resisters was made more rapid and effective with firearms,¹⁵¹ and the goods for which cattle were exchanged were less likely to benefit the wider populace.¹⁵² The shrinkage of redistribution mechanisms resulted.¹⁵³ By contrast, the Kwambi case showed that *okasava* still functioned as 'voluntary'. Notables rather delivered up their own cattle to the Kwambi king Negumbo on demand, which forestalled seizure.¹⁵⁴ Levels of confrontation did not reach the same intensity as in Oukwanyama.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p 104.

¹⁴⁹ AGCSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.6.1885; NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 109); Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 103.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 38).

¹⁵¹ AGCSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.6.1885.

¹⁵² See for example AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Chefe Humbe - Governador de Mossamedes, 5.1.1896; AHU 2R 2S 15P, Relatório Ramalho, 1891.

¹⁵³ Oral evidence relates that raiders would attack when it became known people had accumulated cattle. Interview with Adolf Ambambi, Oshigambo, 23.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 132-3).

¹⁵⁴ AVEM c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, 'Haschipala', ca 1910-33.

The second consequence of economic reorientation through trade was that, given the impoverishment of herds to pay for expensive goods such as firearms and horses and the need to replenish stock, the Kwanyama in particular extended their external raiding activities. Intensified raiding in southern Angola synchronised with Portuguese expansion, Boer settlement and the breaking down of those independent pre-colonial societies at the cutting-edge of the advancing frontier economy. It was a time when the decentralised Mbwela and Ngangela societies were highly vulnerable and Kwanyama warbands could step into a relative vacuum.¹⁵⁵

In addition, the Kwanyama and northern Ovambo polities, after initially refusing to sell captives to slave traders in the 1850s,¹⁵⁶ began to capitalise on Angolan demand.¹⁵⁷ The slave trade was officially abolished in Angola in 1875, but continued under new guises.¹⁵⁸ The main stimulus came from the need for *serviçaes* (indentured labour) in plantations on islands such as Sao Tomé.¹⁵⁹ On a much smaller scale, Mbundu rubber dealers needed labour for their fields while they made their expeditions to the eastern rubber forests.¹⁶⁰ Ovambo rulers responded to this demand for slaves by increased sale of war captives and also, for the first time, selling subjects in their own polities accused of witchcraft. Oukwanyama was the most embroiled in this trade. This polity had greater opportunities than the Ndonga or Kwambi for raiding weaker decentralised communities to the north for captives. The Kwambi by contrast found their Ngandjera neighbours no easy target.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁵ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 77.

¹⁵⁶ Andersson, *Notes of Travel*, p 228; Brigitte Lau (ed.), *Carl Hugo Hahn Tügebücher, 1837-60. Diaries* (Windhoek, 1984/5), pp 1030 and 1051.

¹⁵⁷ August Wulforst, *Moses, eine Erstlingsfrucht aus den Ovambo*, Kleine Missionsschriften Nr 55 (Wuppertal-Barmen, n.d.); Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 206-7.

¹⁵⁸ AVEM c/k 22 No 12, Wulforst, 'Kaukungwa', ca. 1910-33; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 30-2; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 135.

¹⁵⁹ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 32 and 64; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 135.

¹⁶⁰ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 16.8.1904.

¹⁶¹ AVEM c/i 19, Bernsmann - Deputation, 6.1.1892; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 158.

Ondonga, Oukwanyama and Uukwambi could not raid one another for captives as the terms of their 'blood-peace' agreements bound them not to engage in war between themselves. Uukwambi had the least external trade, but Ondonga was considerably involved in the slave trade, even after Finnish missionaries succeeded in preventing Portuguese traders gaining direct access to Ndonga kings. Mbangala middlemen continued to enter Ondonga to ply Portuguese wares in exchange for slaves.¹⁶² In addition, 'slaves' from within Ondonga were taken to the Kwanyama market which operated without inhibition, as this Kwanyama oral testimony illustrates:

During that time many people were sold as slaves. People were sold at cheap prices such as a few bottles of wine, because as we understood it they had annoyed their king. Those Kwanyama who were claimed to be wicked people or practising witchcraft and the like were brought in large numbers, strong and weak, but the strong ones got many bottles. The big fish were then enjoying their drinks while their servants sorted out trading affairs with the Portuguese.¹⁶³

Deeper Kwanyama involvement in the slave trade¹⁶⁴ suggests that a greater degree of the violence and exploitation characteristic of the slaving frontier emerged in this polity. A higher threshold of violence in the extraction of commodities, both internally and externally, compounded Kwanyama tendencies towards militarisation, more so than in other Ovambo societies. This later had implications for the nature of Kwanyama primary resistance against colonisation; in the short term it intensified social stratification.

¹⁶² Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 128.

¹⁶³ Interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 88).

¹⁶⁴ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 64 and 77; Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 206-7.

Warbands, slaves and social mobility

As raiding increased, young men were increasingly mobilised into the warbands. There was need for 'lieutenants' skilled in the use of firearms to participate in and lead such fighting. This lieutenancy was doubtless an expanding stratum at the royal court and to a lesser extent attached to *omalenga*. This social category offered the greatest mobility to those ambitious young men whom Clarence-Smith and Moorsom erroneously term *omalenga*.¹⁶⁵ The latter were headmen with authority over districts; these lieutenants were defined by their military activities, their insignia being the possession of a rifle and, more rarely, horses.¹⁶⁶

What was original, especially in Oukwanyama, was that with increased raiding a new dynamism was injected into this stratum by its being opened up very much more widely to loyalty and initiative, so that at some points it was remarkable for its former slave and foreign character.¹⁶⁷ An outstandingly heterogeneous group of young men became a permanent feature at court in the reign of Namhadi; from this group almost certainly came the lieutenants who played their role in the warbands.¹⁶⁸

The numerous personnel of his palace is not recruited among his own subjects, but from slaves or vagabonds who have taken refuge there from other Ovambo tribes.¹⁶⁹

It suggests that warbandism, both internal and external, offered some opportunity for social mobility in Oukwanyama from the 1880s. Life histories

¹⁶⁵ More confusion arises over the usage by one Finnish researcher of the term war-leader, when he really means war-doctor; the same researcher uses the term war commander to describe the lieutenants who came under the overall authority of one *elenga*. Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 48.

¹⁶⁶ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, cx 9, Chefe Humbe - Governador Mossamedes, 5.1.1896; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 76; Tönjes, *Ovamboland*, pp 112-3.

¹⁶⁷ AGCSp 478-B-III, Duparquet - TRP, 26.3.1885.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

of later Christian converts show that this was an option for young men with restricted access to cattle.¹⁷⁰ There is a great deal that remains unclear about the informal workings of patronage and promotion, the opening up of social mobility and the degree of systematisation of these processes. But some of these lieutenants were, on proof of loyalty, promoted to the position of councillor and became *omalenga*, though this may not have been as frequent as some secondary sources suggest.¹⁷¹ Amongst all the great headmen of Oukwanyama in the three decades before colonisation, who were close councillors of kings, only Hamukoto wa Kapa was of slave origin.¹⁷² More frequent were foreign *omalenga*, such as Sheetekela, the fugitive king of Ombandja after 1907, who became one of Mandume ya Ndemufayo's 'war generals'.¹⁷³

Growth of power of the omalenga

One indication of the impact of merchant capital was the intensification of pre-existing rivalries between kings and *omalenga*. This was noticeable in the increasing *omalenga* encroachment on the division of raiding spoils. Finnish sources suggest that, upon return from an external raid, the earlier and centralised procedure was for the leader of the warband to divide the spoils so that each fighter received one head of cattle, while the

¹⁷⁰ AVEM, c/k 22, No 3.2, Wulfhorst, 'Schalulange', ca 1910-33.

¹⁷¹ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 76-8; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 205; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 131.

¹⁷² Interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 7.10.1989. Williams refers to several others outside Oukwanyama; *Precolonial Communities*, p 114.

¹⁷³ Interview with Joshua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 107); interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 192); interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 54). Williams erroneously states Sheetekela fled to Okalongo after Mandume's death in 1917 (*Precolonial Communities*, p 166). He was in fact exiled to the Kavango for several years by South African colonial officials, and later re-settled in Okalongo by order of the same. See Chapter 6.

reconnaissance spies and those who distinguished themselves received several head. Most of the booty was taken to the king, who divided it with his war commanders. In Oukwanyama this was clearly no longer the case; in Ondonga, according to Siiskonen, the prerogative of the king to the greatest share of the spoils had also been subverted by the 1900s.¹⁷⁴

Internally, once kings such as Namhadi had opened *okasava* to abuse, this was carried much further by *omalenga*.¹⁷⁵ The access of *omalenga* to firepower and their control of manpower in their districts offered opportunities for aggrandisement. Sckär concluded that '*Omalenga* take ever more power into their hands and in the districts where they live they rule like little princes'.¹⁷⁶ On the evidence of Rhenish missionaries after 1890, it appears that *omalenga* were undercutting the profitable preserves of the Kwanyama kingship in its 'classic arbitrating functions'.¹⁷⁷ The rivalry and at times animosity¹⁷⁸ between *omalenga* and Rhenish missionaries require that caution be exercised in evaluating the latter's evidence. But the decentralising pulls operated by these headmen are corroborated in alternative sources.¹⁷⁹

Centralised royal judicial functions in Oukwanyama were eroded by the increasing trend of headmen hearing cases in their own districts:

Earlier everything was adjudicated from the king's homestead through the king and his judges under the guidance of sorcerers. Today every elenga has his own tribunal. The people go with their requests to an elenga, and here they would be heard and their affairs arranged. At the king's, they often had to wait for days, and then often made their way home with their problems unsolved.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 220-1.

¹⁷⁵ AVEM c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, 'Haschipala', ca 1910-33.

¹⁷⁶ AVEM c/k 7 No 9, Sckär, *Beitrag zu den Sitten: Kurze Geschichte der Ovakuanjama*, 1899.

¹⁷⁷ The phrase is Clarence-Smith's and Moorsom's: see 'Underdevelopment', p 98.

¹⁷⁸ See especially AVEM c/k 22 No 11, Wulfhorst, 'Der Missionar im Kampf mit den Heidentum', ca 1910-33.

¹⁷⁹ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, (Appendix 7, pp 39-40); NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, p 125.

¹⁸⁰ AVEM c/k 7 No 9, Sckär, *Beitrag zu den Sitten: Kurze Geschichte der Ovakuanjama*, 1899.

Omalenga had always dealt with smaller legal cases and held their own tribunals.¹⁸¹ This was probably ground that had long been fought over. In the conditions prevailing in the reign of Namhadi's successor, Weyulu ya Hedimbi, *omalenga* increased their initiatives to assume wider judicial functions, enabling them to exercise greater patronage. Where people found their cases satisfactorily handled by a local *elenga*, after the payment of an ox, they would often choose to settle in that district.¹⁸² Sckär asserted that in outlying districts, 'The king has no more power here.'¹⁸³ It was possible that a headman could settle new adherents in his district and consolidate his local base. *Omalenga* took care to reinforce these usurpations with magical precautions; some worked themselves into positions where they were powerful enough to recruit sorcerers for their own protection.

If the chief gets angry with the *elenga* and summons him, perhaps the one summoned will come, but he has no fear, for the *omalenga* have their own magicians with magic means to protect them from the chief. The latter knows this.¹⁸⁴

King Weyulu ya Hedimbi frequently displayed reluctance to confront powerful *omalenga*. When Rhenish missionaries requested a piece of land to open a second station away from the royal residence in the early 1890s, they favoured Neholo's district.¹⁸⁵ Weyulu, knowing Neholo's antagonism to Christian missionaries, admitted he would not be able to protect them from any attack by Neholo and persuaded them to settle in Omupanda, which came under the jurisdiction of a more favourably inclined *elenga*, Weyulu's

¹⁸¹ Nogueira, *Raça Negra*, p 267.

¹⁸² AVEM c/k 7 No 9, Sckär, *Beitrag zu den Sitten: Kurze Geschichte der Ovakuanjama*, 1899.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ Auala ELCIN Library and Archive, Oniipa, Z III 2, *Chronik der Station Omupanda*, 1915.

aunt Nekoto.¹⁸⁶ In another case, a sub-headman of the royal *elenga* Kapa robbed cattle from a royal outpost. Weyulu proved unable to send men into Kapa's area to pursue the criminal. Kapa refused to surrender him. A state of near-war threatened between king and *elenga*.¹⁸⁷

Siiskonen argues that the *élite* constituted by *omalenga* could not function as a united pressure group; it was made up of competing individuals.¹⁸⁸ This conclusion, though based on Ondonga where centrifugal rivalry was at a lower pitch than in Oukwanyama, is generally valid. It was an *élite* ridden with its own rivalries. Some *omalenga* were more ambitious than others; the undermining of royal authority by *omalenga*, at times blatant, was not consistent.

More forceful kings such as Nehale Iya Mpingana of eastern Ondonga did punish particular *omalenga*, as one case in 1902 demonstrated.¹⁸⁹ Mandume ya Ndemufayo, the Kwanyama king after 1911, was the most striking example of a royal attempt to recover ground lost to the *omalenga*. Mandume succeeded to a considerable extent in rolling back the *omalenga* as part of a populist and reformist rule which lasted only six years.¹⁹⁰

Subalterns

Internal raiding and resistance to it were the clearest symptoms of strain between different social strata in Oukwanyama. The impact on non-*élite* of both increased surplus appropriation and intensified erosion of centralised royal functions was considerable. As Chapman remarked of the last decades of the 19th century:

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p 2.

¹⁸⁷ AVEM c/i 19, Bernsmann, Anfänge der Arbeit in Ovamboland 1890-97, 6.1.1892.

¹⁸⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 221-3.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 223.

¹⁹⁰ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 80-81. See Chapter 4.

The state of Cuanhama in those days was a very unpleasant one for the Natives of the country who were continually being harassed not only by the Chief and his brother, Nande, but by such miscreants as Mbishi and other members of the Royal family.¹⁹¹

Subaltern responses were varied. If a victim was raided of his cattle by an *elenga*, he could appeal to the king. But this was usually only after acquiring the support of another *elenga* who agreed to approach the king. In successful appeals the king was paid a large fee, but the litigant would usually recover no more than two to four of a former herd of twenty head, because the mediating *elenga* also took a fee.¹⁹²

Very often householders had no recourse to higher justice. In 1899, the German official Lieutenant Franke was struck by the extent to which the average family homestead was fortified against local warbands.¹⁹³ Grassroot responses to the cattle depredations by *élites* and their followers were also violent.¹⁹⁴

The fact of the Chief, Uejulu, and his brother raiding their own people's cattle, was considered a natural thing for Chiefs to do but the natives resented it and endeavoured to defend themselves as well as they could against the practice.¹⁹⁵

Early migrant workers to Angolan plantations sought to buy guns,¹⁹⁶ not only to exchange for cattle when they returned to Ovambo, but also to defend family herds from warbands. An elderly Kwanyama informant told a German missionary in 1908, 'Today the herders must protect their cattle with a gun

¹⁹¹ NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 2, p 125.

¹⁹² AVEM c/k 7 No 9, Sckär, Beitrag zu den Sitten: Kurze Geschichte der Ovakuanjama, 1899.

¹⁹³ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; Duparquet also referred to the defences set up by the Ombalantu against raiders. AGCSSp 466-A-VII, Duparquet, Renseignements sur l'Ovampo et le Kaoko, ca 1879.

¹⁹⁴ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 38).

¹⁹⁵ NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 2, p 125.

¹⁹⁶ NAN ZBU AI H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

from attacks by the headmen.¹⁹⁷ Portuguese traders sold weapons directly to poorer sections of society, but these tended to be outmoded rifles. It was very problematical if resisters, when raided, injured or killed any member of the ruling lineage, whose royal blood was sacred. This 'blood-guilt' entailed execution or flight.¹⁹⁸

Emigration was a common practice when households received warning of imminent raids.¹⁹⁹ Most Ovambo polities accepted refugees from neighbouring communities. Permanent exile outside Ovambo was also an option. This was not new, but once the economic stresses increased from the 1880s, exile communities grew.²⁰⁰ A Kwanyama community of about two thousand lived on the outskirts of Onkhumbi by 1896.²⁰¹ In northern Hereroland in the 1880s, a few dozen Ndonga established an independent community sustained by herding and migrant labour.²⁰² An alternative means of avoiding stock depredations was to send cattle to join the herds in neighbouring polities. Household and lineage elders sought to contract out cattle to people with whom they could broadly claim kinship.²⁰³

The options for resistance described above were more in the nature of a response to specific oppression by *omalenga* and kings. The problems of impoverishment through cattle losses contributed to other processes, most notably migrant labour. This became an increasingly important option for young men from the 1890s. Conversion to Christianity also grew, after a very slow beginning. These two movements were part of a wider re-orientation of

¹⁹⁷ Wulfhorst, *Von Hexen und Zauberern*, p 8.

¹⁹⁸ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, ethnographisches, animismus, ca 1901-13.

¹⁹⁹ Wulfhorst, *Schüwesa*, p 6.

²⁰⁰ BG 23 1905-06, p 302.

²⁰¹ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, No Vermelho 9, Chefe Humbe - Governador Mossamedes, 5.1.1896.

²⁰² NAN ZBU WII k6, Distriktsamt Omaruru - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 9.4.1906; ZBU

JXIII B3, Distriktsamt Outjo - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 2.3.1910.

²⁰³ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, pp 50-75 passim; c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, 'Haschipala', ca 1910-33.

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²⁰⁰ BG 23 1905-06, p 302.

²⁰¹ AHU Companhia de Mossamedes, No Vermelho 9, Chefe Humbe - Governador Mossamedes, 5.1.1896.

²⁰² NAN ZBU WII k6, Distriktsamt Omaruru - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 9.4.1906; ZBU JXIII B3, Distriktsamt Outjo - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 2.3.1910.

²⁰³ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, pp 50-75 passim; c/k 22 No 4, Wulfhorst, 'Haschipala', ca 1910-33.

society, gradually effected by the long-term impact of merchant capital on the particular ensemble of social relations in Ovamboland.

Clarence-Smith and Moorsom suggest that social differentiation sharpened in Ovamboland over the period in question, along with wider immiseration.²⁰⁴ There is overwhelming evidence to support this argument. Internal raiding affected those with smaller cattle herds more absolutely.²⁰⁵ These processes intensified in the last decade of the nineteenth century and, in 1897, rinderpest hugely compounded the problem.

Effects of the rinderpest epidemic, 1897

Cattle represented a range of things to the Ovambo: they provided milk and hides, they were fundamental to bridewealth and land acquisition, a religious-sacrificial resource and the main means of exchange.²⁰⁶ In the range of damage inflicted by cattle losses through rinderpest, Ovamboland was hardly different from a hundred other communities in central and southern Africa. But the socio-political impact showed contrasts with neighbouring polities which had been more deeply affected by the penetration of mercantilism, colonial rule and the proximity of white settlers.

Terence Ranger argues that for eastern and southern Africa, 'the greatest impact on African ideas came not from the collapse of beasts but from the threatened collapse of societies.'²⁰⁷ This section will attempt to gauge the impact of rinderpest on Ovambo worldviews, though the evidence is sparse. Considerably more can be said about the effects on the socio-economic

²⁰⁴ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', pp 104-5.

²⁰⁵ AVEM 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches, Ethnographisches, Animismus*, ca 1901-13.

²⁰⁶ BG 19 1898-9, pp 455-6; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 42.

²⁰⁷ Terence Ranger, 'Plagues of Beasts and Men: Prophetic Responses to Epidemic in Eastern and Southern Africa' (unpublished paper, University of Oxford, 1991), p 7; see also T. Ranger and P. Slack, *Epidemics and Ideas* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

base, for rinderpest devastated the local economy, especially in the short term.

Rinderpest travelled from its source in the Horn of Africa through the east coast and central regions, stopping at the Zambezi for four years.²⁰⁸ Its progression through southern Africa followed well-worn trade courses.²⁰⁹ It penetrated as far as the Cape, then travelled through Bechuanaland to reach Lake Ngami at the beginning of 1897.²¹⁰ It was first seen in GSWA in April 1897, in Grootfontein.²¹¹

The German administration, acutely aware of the unfolding of the contagion further south, had prepared for the onslaught. Kohlstock, previously assistant to the veterinary officer in the Cape, Koch, directed a number of preventive measures.²¹² A new quarantine line divided northern Hereroland from Ovamboland, with the erection of a 550-kilometre long string of military stations.²¹³ The stoppage of all trade between central SWA and the east and north checked the flow of the pest for some months. But this was temporary. Rinderpest was soon raging in Hereroland.²¹⁴ Continued attempts at preventive measures included 'stamping out'.²¹⁵ One of the first instances in GSWA was a trader whose oxen were shot and wagon burned with all belongings between Outjo and Grootfontein, in May 1897.²¹⁶ A 'disinfecting station' was erected in Hereroland and inoculation conducted from stations established for the purpose. This vaccination was on a marginal scale, not easily accessible and of benefit to mainly white cattle-owners.²¹⁷

²⁰⁸ Charles van Onselen, 'Reactions to Rinderpest in Southern Africa 1896-97', *JAH*, XIII, 3 (1972), p 473.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 163.

²¹¹ Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 1.5.1897.

²¹² Bley, *South West Africa*, p 124.

²¹³ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 163.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 164.

²¹⁵ Van Onselen, 'Reactions to Rinderpest', pp 482-3.

²¹⁶ Bley, *South West Africa*, p 124; Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 1.5.1897.

²¹⁷ Bley, *South West Africa*, p 124.

Rinderpest first appeared in Ovamboland in Uukwambi in July 1897.²¹⁸ It then spread with great rapidity to Ondonga, Oukwanyama and the rest of the floodplain.²¹⁹ It crossed the Kunene river, penetrating the Nkhumbi area in October and the Huila highlands in November²²⁰ with devastating speed and universally high fatality.²²¹ 'Every day thousands of immolated victims fell.'²²² The entire plateau of southern Angolan came to resemble a 'vast hecatomb'.²²³

As in the rest of SWA, more is known about the responses of European agents and veterinary science to the epidemic in Ovamboland than local African responses. Rhenish and Finnish missionaries had undertaken inoculation some time before its appearance,²²⁴ as did Spiritan missionaries in Portuguese territory.²²⁵ Axel Eriksson, who travelled to the Humpata Boer community from GSWA to encourage inoculation using Koch's method, halted on his way north and used his influence with Weyulu ya Hedimbi to promote inoculation by the Rhenish mission amongst the Kwanyama.²²⁶

Initially, the mission inoculation campaign met with passive resistance.²²⁷ Popular objection was rooted in reservations over collecting bile with needles and injecting sickness into healthy animals.²²⁸ The Nkhumbi too

²¹⁸ BG 19 1898-9, p 469. Martti Rautanen believed it had first appeared in August: Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 30-31.8.1897.

²¹⁹ AVEM B/c II:54, Wulfhorst - Direktor RMG, 22.9.1897; Wulfhorst - Direktor RMG, 18.10.1897; B/c II:68, Ickler - Direktor RMG, 4.12.1897.

²²⁰ BG 19 1898-9, p 455.

²²¹ G.S. Dias (ed.), *Artur de Paiva*, Vol 2 (Lisbon, 1938), p 93, gives 93 per cent as the average figure; 90 per cent in southern Angola is given by Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 246.

²²² BG 19 1898-9, p 469.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 15-16.9.1897; AVEM c/k 22 No 5, Wulfhorst, Ansprache am Missionsabend, 1933.

²²⁵ BG 19 1898-9, pp 454-7; AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte - Gerrer, 20.4.1898; Lecomte - TRP, 20.4.1898; Lecomte - TRP, 10.7.1898; Lecomte - TRP, 1.9.1898.

²²⁶ AVEM c/k 22, No 5, Wulfhorst, Ansprache am Missionsabend, 1933; NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 1, p 46.

²²⁷ RMG *Berichte* 1898, p 74.

²²⁸ Ibid, p 206.

protested at direct transmission of disease into the animals.²²⁹ In the early stages of rinderpest therefore, mistrust of the vaccine and methods of administering it was nearly universal. Early inoculation efforts were also inhibited by the difficulties in obtaining the quality of gall that Koch's method required for the vaccine to be effective.²³⁰

Inoculation itself was not a great success,²³¹ but after the first ravages, the method convinced enough Kwanyama that it was beneficial and soon the Rhenish missionary Wulforth was travelling widely to perform inoculations.²³² King Weyulu had been the first to inoculate,²³³ then notables and wealthier cattle-owners close to the king swung towards this view.²³⁴ When the rinderpest first appeared, the only cattle to have been inoculated in Oukwanyama were those of the mission, the king, and of the small Christian community.²³⁵ But during the course of the whole epidemic, Wulforth estimated that he inoculated a total of 6,000 cattle in Oukwanyama.²³⁶ Similarly, the Finnish missionary Savola in Ondonga calculated that he vaccinated roughly 2,800 head.²³⁷

Figures for the cattle mortality never emerged from Ovamboland, but estimates of losses in neighbouring territories were without doubt closely comparable. Kohlstock declared the death rate of non-inoculated cattle in

²²⁹ Belo de Almeida, 'Campanha do Humbe em 1897-1898', *BSGL*, 55^a Serie, Nos 11 and 12, nov-dez 1936. His article is based on the personal field notes of Artur de Paiva.

²³⁰ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 1, p 46; *RMG Berichte* 1898, p 76; *BG* 19 1898-9, p 469. Both sources detail other methods employed which improved on Koch's, including that of Pasteur.

²³¹ One figure quoted for a herd of 50 inoculated was a success with 44, but it was unlikely the average figure was this high, given the degree of fluctuation typical of results from Koch's method. *RMG Berichte* 1898, p 206. See also Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 165.

²³² *RMG Berichte* 1899, p 205.

²³³ Weyulu initially met with considerable internal criticism for his decision to inoculate. *RMG Berichte* 1898, pp 21 and 205-6.

²³⁴ *RMG Berichte* 1898, p 205.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 76 and 206.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 205.

²³⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 165.

Hereroland to be 95 per cent.²³⁸ He claimed a 50 to 80 per cent survival rate at the few isolated stations set up by the German authorities.²³⁹ In southern Angola, where the politics of rinderpest between colonisers and colonised were more complex and violent, the Nkhumbi district in November 1897 had only 1,000 surviving cattle of an estimated previous population of 25,000. This suggested a death rate of 96 per cent, at a time when the worst was not yet over.²⁴⁰

Although at the end of the epidemic Weyulu was justified in saying that Oukwanyama was left with more cattle than other Ovambo polities,²⁴¹ it is certain that most Kwanyama lost all or almost all their cattle. If inoculation had been effective, it had been the least wealthy (and non-Christian) who were the last to have recourse to it.²⁴² Rinderpest in the short term appeared to threaten universal impoverishment, but in the long term structural differences showed. It is almost certain that the devastation of cattle losses affected the poorer majority of Oukwanyama and other Ovambo polities more absolutely. In the long term this was vital because the reproduction of cattle wealth was more firmly concentrated in households and lineages, who had remained with a greater proportion of surviving cattle. In the years following rinderpest, it became even more difficult for young men with poorer kin connections to gain access to cattle.²⁴³

Economically the cattle losses caused a severe reduction in terms of the actual wealth they represented, but nutritionally the Ovambo were not as dependent on cattle as were the Herero. The grain basis of their diet ensured that the level of malnutrition suffered by Herero after the rinderpest was not

²³⁸ Bley, *South West Africa*, p 125.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p 124.

²⁴⁰ BG 19 1898-9, p 469.

²⁴¹ RMG *Berichte* 1898, p 205.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p 206.

²⁴³ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 104.

replicated.²⁴⁴ Similarly, it is important to be cautious about assumptions that the Herero were victims who lost confidence in their capacity to respond to crisis. If excessive trauma was experienced by Herero communities as Bley implies, the same was not true for the Ovambo. The post-rinderpest Nkhumbi rising north of Ovamboland, which stemmed from attempts to enforce inoculation and accompanying abuses by colonial soldiery, was a different matter altogether.²⁴⁵

Lack of material makes it impossible to document the range and nature of responses by Ovambo healing systems to the rinderpest epidemic and whether these were effective. As rinderpest represented an extreme of epidemic, such responses were likely to have failed. In many parts of Africa, prophets tended to emerge where healing systems failed. In Ovamboland, with most wealth and means of exchange wiped out, dark portents were hinted at by unnamed religious authorities. A great new disease would soon appear to kill people, just as the cattle had perished.²⁴⁶ Wulfhorst speculated that the roots of this lay in the deaths of several people from eating the meat of infected cattle.²⁴⁷ But this rationalist explanation divests the prophecy of its most interesting implications.

The prophecy suggests that some religious sources in Ovamboland saw the ravages of rinderpest as a terrible metaphor of internal corruption, as the Xhosa had seen lungsickness in the previous century.²⁴⁸ Ranger has rightly argued that prophetic leadership - 'intense religiosity' - need not be interpreted as an escape from social contradictions.²⁴⁹ Religion may be interpreted as the idiom of a profound challenge to official orthodoxies of

²⁴⁴ The appalling malaria epidemic which carried off many weakened victims in GSWA was exacerbated by low resistance to disease due to the loss of milk, which was an important component of the Herero diet. Bley, *South West Africa*, p 125.

²⁴⁵ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 1, p 45.

²⁴⁶ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, *Rückblick*, 1917, p 49.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ J.B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise. Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Johannesburg, 1989), p 71.

²⁴⁹ Ranger, 'Plagues', p 13.

African societies themselves. That this was not taken to an extreme amongst the Ovambo, does not detract from strong indications that a challenge was posed.²⁵⁰

Such prophecies were not necessarily a crisis response to one epidemic. The arrival of lungsickness in the 1860s, soon endemic in Ovamboland,²⁵¹ was a prelude to rinderpest and may also have had its prophecies. The example of the Nuer shows that the essentials of a prophetic idiom were already adumbrated before the exigencies posed by major epidemics.²⁵² The latter may have acted as a trigger for these. In the Ovambo case, it is unclear whether the prophecy was a response to a crisis, or of deeper origin. Evidence does not permit more than hypothesis.

Prophetic interpretation was an expression of internal contradictions. Alternatively, many Ovambo projected blame outward on to others, on to the white strangers. Some saw the rot as within, others saw it as without. A so-called 'heathen-party' in Oukwanyama accused missionaries of bringing the disease and a 'bad wind' in general into the country.²⁵³ Three Kwanyama notables died close to the time of the arrival of rinderpest, which lent credence to the accusations.²⁵⁴

Societies in Ovamboland did not collapse as a result of the rinderpest. But Ranger makes an important emphasis when he suggests that the *threat* of collapse affected people's thinking.²⁵⁵ This is as applicable in the political sense as it is in the religious sense he infers. As elsewhere in southern Africa, the Kwanyama were no exception to the widespread belief that rinderpest was a product of the white man's activities.²⁵⁶ But the most striking feature of

²⁵⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 49. This prophecy was said to be 'generally believed' in the early stages of rinderpest.

²⁵¹ NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 1, p 21.

²⁵² Ranger, 'Plagues', pp 14-5 and 30.

²⁵³ RMG Berichte 1898, p 21.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ranger, 'Plagues', p 7.

²⁵⁶ Van Onselen, 'Reactions to Rinderpest', p 479

hostility to whites in this case was its impetus from the anti-Christian lobby of the upper echelons of Kwanyama society. The greater political profile taken by *élites* in their interpretations of causation is perhaps a reflection of their dominance in politics and their control of discourse. Interpretations by the politically marginal were arguably driven into a more religious idiom. Ranger suggests that rinderpest 'seemed to threaten a levelling of society to a uniform impoverishment.'²⁵⁷ In a society as stratified as the Kwanyama, it was just such a threat of a levelling effect of rinderpest which prompted *élites* to mobilise. It was less threatening to project blame outward than to examine internal problems.

Of course, *élites* had a second motive for blaming missionaries, which was their mutual rivalry.²⁵⁸ The rinderpest created new opportunities for political entrepreneurs to mobilize potential constituencies in a conflict whose ground had been contested since the arrival of missionaries. The Rhenish missionaries possibly over-emphasised this rivalry as against a generalised groundswell of grassroots suspicion against them, as this group of anti-Christian headmen had constantly locked horns with the mission.²⁵⁹ But the anti-Christian campaign was now conducted in an increasingly tense climate of rumour and suspicion, which caused the missionaries to fear for their lives and those of their converts.²⁶⁰ The most serious incidents took the form of harassment of missionaries by the Kwanyama princeling Nandjingu, though these had no physical repercussions.²⁶¹ Mission fears were strongly represented to Weyulu, who issued warnings of punishment by death to any attempting to harm the small Christian communities.²⁶²

²⁵⁷ Ranger, 'Plagues', p 7.

²⁵⁸ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, 'Rückblick', 1917.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; *RMG Berichte* 1898, p 21.

²⁶¹ AVEM c/k 22 No 5, Wulfhorst, Ansprache am Missionsabend, 1933.

²⁶² *RMG Berichte* 1898, p 22.

The tide turned slightly when the results of inoculation began to show moderate success.²⁶³ Missionaries were convinced that people became more receptive to the argument they could not have been responsible for the onslaught of the cattle disease in Oukwanyama because it had commenced in Uukwambi, which was free of their presence.²⁶⁴ The 'heathen-party' began to lose ground. Further confidence was evident when King Negumbo requested Wulforth to travel to Uukwambi to perform inoculations, on Weyulu's recommendation.²⁶⁵ By the end of the onslaught, with cattle herds of commoners almost completely destroyed,²⁶⁶ a significant increase in conversion to Christianity occurred.²⁶⁷

Compared with neighbouring African peoples, Ovamboland showed a greater capacity to absorb the shock of rinderpest, especially in political terms. This is largely explicable by its isolation from white outposts of settlement and colonial rule. The fear of worse epidemics raised by prophets²⁶⁸ and the hostility shown against outsiders as bringing the disease gradually wore themselves out;²⁶⁹ strategies for recovery took priority. By contrast, the convulsions in southern Angola showed an extreme of African distress manifested in widespread political rebellion.²⁷⁰ Portuguese intervention in the rinderpest disaster, with militarised 'vaccination brigades', was largely responsible for this.²⁷¹

The contrast between rinderpest policies of the two colonial powers was striking. Pélissier describes the German policy of vaccinating white-owned cattle, allowing Herero and Nama cattle to die unheeded and bringing

²⁶³ AVEM c/i 20 Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917.

²⁶⁴ RMG *Berichte* 1898, p 74.

²⁶⁵ AVEM, c/k 22, No.12, Wulforth, Kaukungwa, ca. 1910-33.

²⁶⁶ AVEM c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917, p 49; NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*; RMG *Berichte* 1898, p 206.

²⁶⁸ AVEM c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917.

²⁶⁹ RMG *Berichte* 1898, p 206.

²⁷⁰ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 437-42.

²⁷¹ NAN A 223, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 1, p 45; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 438.

those communities to economic breaking-point, as very cruel.²⁷² Moreover, given the bungling and corrupt implementation of the Portuguese policy to rescue the Nkhumbi herds from extinction,²⁷³ Ovamboland's remoteness from colonial nuclei left the floodplain better-placed than both their northern and southern African neighbours. While it was true they suffered an internally differentiated impoverishment, the Ovambo were distant from both the brutally interventionist policies of the Portuguese and from the German indifference to the impoverishment suffered by the Herero. The latter could see agonisingly across the fence, as it were, to where German settler herds survived diminished but intact.

The Portuguese handling of the rinderpest crisis in southern Angola led to the third Nkhumbi rising in twelve years.²⁷⁴ The military aspect is better understood when seen in the context of feared renewals of raids by Nama commandos, who were known to have suffered heavy cattle losses in Damaraland.²⁷⁵ But the point was, as Chapman put it:

if the higher authorities had displayed some tact by not permitting an expedition to go to Humbe for the purpose of injecting cattle, the massacre and subsequent expedition to punish the natives for what the troops had been the direct cause might all have been averted.²⁷⁶

The effects of this campaign in Onkhumbi, added to the rinderpest, were severe. The economic stress caused by the epidemic was worsened by Paiva's expedition which confiscated 1,500 head of cattle.²⁷⁷ Between 500 and 800 Nkhumbi had been killed, hundreds of villages burned down and hundreds of men taken away to Humpata under labour 'contracts', many of whom were

²⁷² Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 438.

²⁷³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, pp 45-8.

²⁷⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 437.

²⁷⁵ Belo de Almeida, 'Campanha do Humbe'; Pélissier, *Les Guerres Grises*, p 437.

²⁷⁶ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 49.

²⁷⁷ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 441.

sent to plantations on São Tomé.²⁷⁸ While Ovamboland was not touched directly, the cumulative blows to the Nkhumbi had a diffused effect on the floodplain communities.

Politically, the Kwanyama king Weyulu showed outward support for Portuguese military repression. He agreed to send fighters to Kafu, to prevent rebels taking control there.²⁷⁹ Beyond the obvious advantage of increasing Kwanyama influence to the north, Weyulu's further motives are not clear. In a sense, the weakening of Onkhumbi was the Kwanyama opportunity. Kwanyama raiding parties were drawn ever more consistently into the decentralised communities as far north as the foothills of the Huila uplands.²⁸⁰ This coincided with the eclipse of the Nama commandos, curbed by more effective resistance by Boer and Portuguese settlers.²⁸¹ The increased political and economic weakness of communities such as the Nkhumbi was not counter-balanced by any decisively increased Portuguese presence. Portuguese might tended to be mustered only in the face of foreign pressure. The years up to 1904 show that the Portuguese were powerless to curb Kwanyama and Mbandja warbands. Portuguese ground level imperialism was only allocated extra resources necessary to subdue African groups when larger threats²⁸² or national prestige were implicated.

In conclusion, rinderpest and ensuing rebellion in southern Angola forced the Portuguese to attempt to establish themselves more firmly. It is revealing that while Chapman saw the Nkhumbi revolt as unprecedented,²⁸³ Paiva interpreted the Nkhumbi massacre of Portuguese troops at Jamba

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Belo de Almeida, 'Campanha do Humbe'.

²⁸⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, 'Rückblick', 1917, p 76; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 89.

²⁸¹ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, pp 39-43; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 50.

²⁸² See Douglas C. Wheeler and C. Diane Christensen, 'To Rise with One Mind: the Bailundo Revolt', in Franz-Wilhelm Heimer (ed.), *Social Change in Angola* (Munich, 1973), pp 53-92; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 611-12; Phyllis M. Martin, 'The Violence of Empire', in David Birmingham and Phyllis M. Martin (eds.), *History of Central Africa*, Vol 2 (London, 1983), p 22.

²⁸³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 49.

Kamufate as simply the 'visible sign of a permanent state of latent rebellion', and a good opportunity to suppress what was in reality a 'condition of anarchy.'²⁸⁴ The post-rinderpest era saw the weakened southern Angolan peoples not only prone to Kwanyama raids; as a result of the processes of local accumulation, cattle had become more firmly concentrated in Boer and Portuguese settler hands.²⁸⁵ This in turn prompted increased stock theft by dispossessed Nyaneka, among others, and inevitably led to further reprisals and dislocation.²⁸⁶ In short, relations of exchange and relations of production saw intensified exploitation to the detriment of local African communities, and to the further reinforcement of white settler power.

Southern Angola and Ovamboland illustrated what was generally true elsewhere in central and southern Africa during and after the rinderpest. No structural changes were dramatically brought about, but rinderpest struck along the deepest faultlines and intensified processes of social change which were emergent.²⁸⁷ The stakes in the long-distance trade were heightened by the soaring price of cattle and transportation of goods,²⁸⁸ which promoted the raiding enterprise. Raiding was one of the internal Kwanyama responses to their own cattle losses, despite the short- and medium-term paucity of stock to the north. Greater immiseration of poorer Kwanyama households from rinderpest entailed that more young men became attached to *omalenga* who led raiding parties. The incentives for labour to migrate also increased.

Finally, rinderpest drew the floodplain closer into the two colonial orbits. With Portuguese backing, overtures from the Catholics in 1899 to reopen their Kwanyama mission met with a favourable response from

²⁸⁴ Belo de Almeida, 'Campanha do Humbe'.

²⁸⁵ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 84.

²⁸⁶ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, p 49.

²⁸⁷ Van Onselen, 'Reactions to Rinderpest', pp 487-8.

²⁸⁸ AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte - Gerrer, 20.4.1898; Lecomte - Grizard, 29.3.1899; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 59.

Weyulu.²⁸⁹ On the German side, rinderpest added impetus to the policy of isolation of the floodplain from Hereroland by the erection of military outposts,²⁹⁰ but also increased their concern with the area. Lieutenant Franke's first official visit to Ovamboland followed in 1899.²⁹¹

Difficulties in the shaping of a German Ovambopolitik,²⁹² 1884-1904

Ovamboland was remote from the political and economic concerns of German colonial rule in GSWA during its first two decades.²⁹³ Ovamboland remained largely a *terra incognita*, protected from significant German encroachment by the vast dry waterless expanse of the Thirstbelt. The presence of sympathetic missionaries,²⁹⁴ who supplied detailed socio-economic and demographic profiles of Ovambo polities²⁹⁵ and reported on the activities of traders and Portuguese officials in Angola,²⁹⁶ obviated the need for official presence in the early days.²⁹⁷

²⁸⁹ AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte-Grizard, 4.12.1899; BG 20 1899-1900, p 334; BG 22 1903-4, p 24.

²⁹⁰ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 163.

²⁹¹ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.10.1899.

²⁹² *Ovambopolitik* - policy towards the Ovambo.

²⁹³ Recent research most relevant to German *Ovambopolitik* is Eirola's unpublished dissertation, 'Reservation'; the article by idem., 'Ukwambi Incident', and his forthcoming licentiate thesis at University of Oulu. Before Eirola argued the extent of German interest and the peculiar dynamics of Ovambo-German relations, several authors have tended to dismiss the region as having little or no bearing in German colonial considerations. See for example Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, p 17; Peter Katjavivi, 'Rise of Nationalism in Namibia', p 47; Bley, *South West Africa*, p xxi.

²⁹⁴ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.10.1899.

²⁹⁵ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901.

²⁹⁶ NAN ZBU J XIII B1, Dr K. Dove - Direktor der Kolonial Abteilung, 22.5.1894; Meisenholl - Kaiserliche Landeshauptmannschaft, 27.1.1895; Stahlhut - Leutwein, 17.9.1896.

²⁹⁷ Eirola, 'Ukwambi Incident', pp 75-80 et passim; idem., 'Reservation', passim. Missionaries also passed on official requests; for example, the request not to sell ammunition to the Nama. NAN ZBU WII k1 Bd 1, Bericht No 3, Kaiserliche Landeshauptmannschaft - Auswärtiges Amt, 3.1.1898.

In the protectorate generally, German economic strategies favoured mining interests. Though German officials had noted the labour potential of Ovamboland,²⁹⁸ in the late nineteenth century the demand for mine labour was relatively low. The other interests colonial government sought to promote were those of German settler-farmers,²⁹⁹ a process of 'Germanisation' whose ideological importance Haarhoff has shown.³⁰⁰ The most active white penetration was in areas inhabited by the Herero, Nama and Bergdama.³⁰¹

German thinking on Ovamboland, centred very far away in Windhoek, was affected by the timing and degree of subordination of the southern peoples in the so-called Police Zone. German officials only began to address the *Ovambofrage*³⁰² after the Nama leader Witbooi's capitulation in 1894.³⁰³ The northern border up to this time was the line of military posts between Gobabis-Okombahe-Okahandja-Omaruru.³⁰⁴ After 1894, perspectives on Ovamboland were shaped by more immediate preoccupations with the Herero.³⁰⁵ Following Governor Leutwein's 1894 tour of northern Hereroland, the *Nordbezirk*³⁰⁶ was established with a District Chief in Outjo.³⁰⁷ Leutwein's aim was to cut the connection between Hereroland and the Ovambo, ostensibly to control arms smuggling.³⁰⁸ Outjo sat on the northern route west of Etosha pan, while from 1899³⁰⁹ the second district headquarters was situated in Grootfontein, on the route east of Etosha to the Kavango.³¹⁰ In 1897, when rinderpest broke out, there were 150 German soldiers in the

²⁹⁸ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Mueller - ?, 12.1.1901; ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

²⁹⁹ Bley, *South West Africa*, p 107; Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism', pp 90-2.

³⁰⁰ Haarhoff, *Wild South-West*, p 62.

³⁰¹ Gordon, 'Variations', p 263.

³⁰² *Ovambofrage* - the Ovambo question.

³⁰³ Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 67.

³⁰⁴ Bley, *South West Africa*, p 47.

³⁰⁵ See for example Bley, *South West Africa*, pp 62 and 144.

³⁰⁶ *Nordbezirk* - Northern District.

³⁰⁷ Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', pp 67-8.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p 67.

³⁰⁹ Bley, *South West Africa*, p 47.

³¹⁰ Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 68.

Nordbezirk,³¹¹ well-positioned to enforce a quarantine. The German cordon was now drawn further north, through Okaukweyo and Namutoni, both important watering points for Ovambo cattle outposts.³¹²

Increased German proximity to the Ovambo floodplain raised the question of occupation. In the political profiles drawn up by missionaries,³¹³ eastern kings such as Kambonde³¹⁴ and Weyulu³¹⁵ were considered friendly; the Kwambi king Negumbo³¹⁶ and other western Ovambo rulers were regarded as anti-German, as were Nama groups in the Kaoko. When von Estorff³¹⁷ drew up provisional plans for military occupation, he insisted separate columns should occupy Ondonga and the Kaoko to take account of the latter.³¹⁸

Politico-strategic considerations drew Germans into an official and public debate on the occupation of Ovamboland, rather than economic interest. It was argued that arms-dealing and the nature of Portuguese occupation of southern Angola made the *Schutzgebiet*³¹⁹ vulnerable. The north was politically very sensitive, bedevilled by the inconclusive and conflicting cartography over the boundary between German and Portuguese territories.³²⁰ Put very simply, the two powers had agreed that the latitude would be demarcated by the 'cataracts'³²¹ on the Kunene river. But the respective cartography revealed Germany had intended one set of falls, and

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ NAN ZBU WII k1 Bd 1, Bericht No 3, Kaiserl. Landeshauptmannschaft - Auswärtiges Amt, 3.1.1898.

³¹⁴ NAN ZBU WII k1 Bd 1, von Estorff - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 27.10.1898.

³¹⁵ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; Volkmann (?) - Kaiserl. Gouvernement (No 9121), ca 1901.

³¹⁶ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 68.

³¹⁷ Ludwig von Estorff, Deputy Commander of German forces in GSWA between 1901-02. See Bley, *South West Africa*, p 160.

³¹⁸ NAN ZBU WII k1 Bd 1, von Estorff - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 27.10.1898.

³¹⁹ *Schutzgebiet* - protectorate.

³²⁰ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; Franke - Leutwein, 22.1.1900.

³²¹ The terminology for 'cataracts' in two languages also led to confusion.

Portugal another; when the agreement was made the existence of two falls was unclear, as explorations had not been thorough.³²² Thus Germany claimed several miles further north than Portugal would allow. Likewise, Portugal claimed several miles further south than Germany would allow.³²³

Despite the ambiguity of the cartography, it became clear that most of Oukwanyama was in Portuguese territory, as were the Mbandja and Vale polities.³²⁴ Lieutenant Franke argued the importance of keeping the Kwanyama polity together. 'The present boundary is senseless as long as it cuts through people living under one king... the Kwanyama area under Weyulu is the most valuable to us.'³²⁵ The inexactitude made it unclear which tribes between GSWA and the Kunene were regular raiders and which colonial power should deal with them. Boundary demarcation was argued to be a necessary prelude to any occupation.³²⁶

Germany attempted to isolate Ovamboland from the rest of the *Schutzgebiet*,³²⁷ but this was never completely effective. Even if Germany had been able to enforce bans on the arms and slave trade, the state of affairs in Angola rendered these efforts meaningless. Contraband flourished in Angolan conditions and trickled into GSWA.³²⁸ As thorough investigation in southern Angola by the German Consul Dorbritz soon revealed, the deep-rooted slave-trade was the foundation of routes and conduits which the illicit arms trade now utilised.³²⁹ The informal network now dealing in *serviçal* procurement were ideal for a clandestine arms trade. Its agents were mainly from the ubiquitous small trading houses; the colonial government in Angola

³²² Sakeus Akweenda, 'International Law and the Protection of Namibia's Territorial Integrity' (PhD Thesis, London School of Economics, 1989), pp 363 and 375.

³²³ League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission, *Minutes*, 2.7.1924; Akweenda, 'International Law', p 379. See map, Appendix 3.

³²⁴ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

³²⁶ NAN ZBU J XIII B3 Bd 3, Mueller - ?, 12.1.1901.

³²⁷ See Max E. Baericke, *Naulila. Erinnerungen eines Zeitgenossen* (Swakopmund, 1981), p 25; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 81; *idem*, 'Reservation', pp 34-7.

³²⁸ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Bericht über die Reise von Dr Gerber, ca 1903-11.

³²⁹ NAN ZBU AI H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

was unaware of its extent. The transit area for illegal trade was the hinterland of Benguela, which had many arteries to the south. Goods were also smuggled through Ovamboland into Damaraland and possibly Kavango. The Portuguese system of economic administration was incapable, argued Dorbritz, of controlling the seepage of smuggled goods from Benguela into Ovamboland.³³⁰

Lieutenant Franke's visit in 1899 was prompted mainly by this concern over arms smuggling into Hereroland via the porous northern trade networks.³³¹ Franke concluded that occupation would be 'the opportunity to end Portuguese economic mis-management and land wastage, to terminate the trade in slaves, munitions and *schmups*.'³³² Dorbritz put it even more strongly in 1904, arguing that Ovamboland's occupation was a 'life question' for GSWA.³³³

German officials were - in a sense ironically - also concerned by Portuguese brutality and exploitation, which provoked violent resistance in Angola. The recent *débâcle* during and after the rinderpest epidemic was a case in point. Portuguese weakness in subduing the populations of her Angolan hinterlands raised the spectre of contagious rebellion, which had implications for northern GSWA. Portuguese colonial methods were therefore argued to be a source of instability to GSWA.³³⁴

In economic terms, the occupation of Ovamboland held little attraction.³³⁵ Possibilities for plantation agriculture were mooted, primarily cotton and tobacco.³³⁶ Finnish missionaries experimented with the former.³³⁷ But it was considered that irrigation from the Kunene river was a pre-

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

³³⁴ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 11.11.1904.

³³⁵ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899.

³³⁶ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Wulfhorst - RMG, 6.1.1905; ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Mueller - Leutwein, 12.1.190(1?).

³³⁷ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Bericht über die Reise von Dr Gerber, ca 1903-11.

condition for the success of any cash crop.³³⁸ Economic viability depended on proper scientific research and surveying of the area, which was slow to materialise.³³⁹ The floodplain was also considered unsuitable for white settlement, due to endemic malaria in the wet season.³⁴⁰

The necessity for irrigation in 'uneconomic'³⁴¹ Ovamboland highlighted the attractions of southern Angola. After his 1901 research trip, von Winckler argued that southern Angola was more fertile and water conditions more favourable than in Ovamboland, making it suitable for white ranching. Once herds had recovered from the rinderpest losses, cattle would be available cheaply from Ovamboland. He recommended growing cotton and tobacco, as there was sufficient rainfall.³⁴²

Such perspectives fed into German arguments that Portugal was too weak to exploit the potential wealth of her colonies efficiently.³⁴³ In 1898 Germany and Britain signed a secret treaty which provided for a division of Portugal's colonial empire in the case of the latter's bankruptcy.³⁴⁴ Germany had strong expectations that southern Angola would in future become incorporated into her south-west African possession.³⁴⁵ The *Angolabund* was established to facilitate economic penetration.³⁴⁶ Railway projects to link Otavi in GSWA with the Angolan coast in 1901 were also bound up with the

³³⁸ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904. The missionary Wulfhorst was initially optimistic about the possibilities of redirecting the Kunene towards Oukwanyama. NAN ZBU JXIII B1, Wulfhorst - ?, 29.2.1897.

³³⁹ NAN ZBU JXIII B3, Franke - Leutwein, 22.1.1900.

³⁴⁰ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901; ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Bruggemann - Kaiserl. Landespolizei, ca 1908-11.

³⁴¹ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899.

³⁴² NAN ZBU JXIII B3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901, Ovamboland.

³⁴³ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Franke - Leutwein, 23.11.1899; Baericke, *Naulila*, p 20;

³⁴⁴ Richard A. Voeltz, *German Colonialism and the South West Africa Company* (Ohio, 1988), pp 70 and 80; Moorsom, 'Formation', p 80. The Portuguese financial crisis was in fact relieved in 1902 by a new agreement with foreign bondholders.

³⁴⁵ This aspect of the treaty became widely known. However, Britain also signed a secret treaty with Portugal in 1899 promising to respect the integrity of Portugal's African colonies; Germany remained unaware of this until 1913. Voeltz, *German Colonialism*, p 70.

³⁴⁶ Baericke, *Naulila*, pp 18-20.

question of southern Angolan incorporation into GSWA.³⁴⁷ These plans had implications for Ovamboland, but only in the longer term.

The question of German occupation of Ovamboland was however raised in a very immediate sense by an incident in 1900, which revealed a great deal about Ovambo attitudes to German penetration.³⁴⁸ The incident arose over Kwambi mistreatment of two German traders, Schneidewind and Petersen, and their Nama servants. The party entered Uukwambi in transit to Oukwanyama, but were refused permission to remain after the Kwambi king, Negumbo, ascertained the two white traders were German.³⁴⁹ Their wagon was robbed and as the party moved off, shots were fired. Fearing for their lives, the Germans fled on foot,³⁵⁰ leaving their Nama hands with the wagon, one of whom was killed when he tried to escape on horseback.³⁵¹ The wagon and servants were then brought back to Negumbo.³⁵² The two Germans reached the southern waterholes at Onoolongo three days later where they received assistance. One of the two, Schneidewind, travelled on to Outjo to report the incident to the German authorities.³⁵³

Negumbo's treatment of the two Germans was in contrast to his attitude towards traders of other nationalities, especially Axel Eriksson³⁵⁴ and William Chapman.³⁵⁵ The grounds for mobilising anti-German sentiment

³⁴⁷ Voeltz, *German Colonialism*, pp 77-80; Goldblatt, *History of South West Africa* (Cape Town, 1971), pp 165-7; Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, pp 105-6. For reference to German water projects planned for southern Angola, see Christel Stern and Brigitte Lau, *Namibian Water Resources and their Management. A Preliminary History* (Windhoek, 1990), p 58. Not until the Portuguese-South African co-operation of the 1970s did such water schemes finally become a reality.

³⁴⁸ For an exhaustive empirical account of the incident, see Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', pp 66-90.

³⁴⁹ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Schneidewind, 10.9.1900; Protokoll Bill Smith, 12.10.1900.

³⁵⁰ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Schneidewind, 10.9.1900.

³⁵¹ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Hendrik Turdor und Jakobus, 15.9.1900.

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Schneidewind, 10.9.1900; Protokoll Struys, 13.9.1900.

³⁵⁴ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Schneidewind, 10.9.1900; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 69.

³⁵⁵ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, pp 123-5.

were complex. Negumbo's predecessor Nuuyoma had first invited and then expelled the Finnish mission into Uukwambi.³⁵⁶ Relations remained tense. Negumbo also wished to control the amount of trade coming into Uukwambi,³⁵⁷ having assumed the kingship in Uukwambi in conditions of great instability.³⁵⁸ But the feature which remains striking is the anti-Germanism. Possibly Ovambo intelligence on German activities in the south had left few illusions as to the threat of German power,³⁵⁹ especially after the recent 'pacification' of the Nama.

How far this tendency reflected social tension within Uukwambi is uncertain. Negumbo's moves to assert central power are striking. Compared with Oukwanyama and even Ondonga, much less is known about Kwambi royal tensions with *omalenga* or other groups, but Uukwambi seems to have been exceptionally centralised under the kingship. There may have been an underswell of political rivalry which in this incident showed itself in an unauthorised attack on two German traders,³⁶⁰ but Negumbo's pointed enquiry as to their nationality seems to contradict this. It is conceivable that while Negumbo sent the two traders away, the initiative to rob the wagon was taken without his sanction.³⁶¹ This seems plausible in the light of Negumbo's prompt offer of compensation for goods lost, and his messages to the victims that they could collect their wagon at a specified point.³⁶² The order to shoot may not have been given by Negumbo.³⁶³

³⁵⁶ RMG *Berichte* 1892, pp 22-3; Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, pp 103-4; Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 281; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 76.

³⁵⁷ Serton (ed.), *Narrative*, p 100.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p 104.

³⁵⁹ For the deployment of Ovambo intelligence during 1904, see Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 274.

³⁶⁰ Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 70.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Struys, 13.9.1900.

³⁶³ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Jan de Jager, 5.10.1900.

Evidence is more concrete regarding German responses to the incident. Kliefoth wished for an immediate punitive expedition.³⁶⁴ Leutwein by contrast favoured a negotiated settlement and held back Kliefoth until he made his next tour of Ovamboland.³⁶⁵ Negumbo offered compensation but insisted that Kliefoth, the Kommandant in Outjo, should not advance into Ovambo, or the Kwambi would attack him with Ngandjera, Kwaluudhi and Mbandja allies.³⁶⁶ Tension throughout Ovamboland was by now considerable.³⁶⁷ The Germans used the Finnish missionary Rautanen to negotiate with the Kwambi leader. It appears that Rautanen was assured that after any action taken, if Negumbo was replaced with a pro-German chief, the Finnish mission would be given precedence in a new western mission field in Uukwambi and Ongandjera.³⁶⁸

When Leutwein finally arrived in the north in late 1900, he was persuaded that forceful intervention was necessary.³⁶⁹ An ultimatum was sent via Kambonde that Negumbo should pay fifty cattle in compensation.³⁷⁰ Negumbo temporised; both sides prepared for military confrontation. The Kwambi began sending out military feelers to the south.³⁷¹ The issue was by now clouded by the threat of an Ovambo alliance behind Negumbo, believed likely in the face of a German military threat.³⁷²

German officials now seriously weighed up the relative merits of only sending a punitive mission against Negumbo, or occupying the whole of

³⁶⁴ Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 281; NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Kliefoth - Leutwein, 15.9.1900.

³⁶⁵ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Leutwein - Kliefoth, 26.9.1900.

³⁶⁶ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Protokoll Bill Smith, 12.10.1900.

³⁶⁷ Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 75.

³⁶⁸ The Kwambi had previously blocked mission access to Ongandjera. Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 14.11.1900; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', pp 76-7.

³⁶⁹ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Kliefoth - Leutwein, 29.1.1901; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', pp 79-80.

³⁷⁰ Eirola, 'Uukwambi incident', p 77.

³⁷¹ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Kliefoth - Leutwein, 29.5.1901; Leutwein - Kliefoth, 26.6.1901; Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 80.

³⁷² Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 279.

Ovamboland militarily.³⁷³ The implications of the latter brought a negative response from Berlin.³⁷⁴ Berlin had given considerable weight to the views of the Rhenish missionary in Oukwanyama, August Wulfhorst,³⁷⁵ who favoured non-intervention, indirect penetration and minimum disruption.³⁷⁶ Wulfhorst also later argued that Ovambo 'unrest' had been limited to the Ndonga leader Nehale's attack on Jordan,³⁷⁷ instigated by the Herero; and the Kwambi incident, in which no German had been killed. These did not in themselves merit punitive expeditions or military occupation.³⁷⁸

Berlin's decision averted confrontation with the Kwambi and the incident fizzled out. German officers on the ground were left with a residue of frustration; Berlin's rejection of local initiative meant that Germany's *Ovambopolitik* remained non-interventionist.³⁷⁹

Military stations were not set up in Ovamboland after the incident, though Mueller recommended regular patrols from Namutoni or Okaukweyo to the different polities, 'to demonstrate the might of the German Empire.'³⁸⁰ His reasoning was that this would strengthen friendly chiefs and imbue anti-German leaders with respect. Local official sentiment remained largely in favour of some form of intervention in Ovamboland. 'In the end the power of the chiefs has to be broken.'³⁸¹ By 1903, the German policy of sending military patrols into Ovamboland had increased suspicions of their motives;³⁸²

³⁷³ Ibid.

³⁷⁴ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Kolonial Abtheilung - Leutwein, 25.2.1901; ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, *Berliner Volkszeitung*, 2.2.1901; Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 281.

³⁷⁵ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 1, Kolonial Abtheilung - Leutwein, 25.2.1901.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Auala ELCIN library Oniipa, Tagebuch Martti Rautanen, 2.7.1886 and 25.9.1886. Nehale had engineered the murder of this trader after promptings by Herero who were angered by Jordan's acquisition of a concession in the Otavi-Grootfontein area. See also Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 192.

³⁷⁸ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Wulfhorst - Barmen, 6.1.1905.

³⁷⁹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 80.

³⁸⁰ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Mueller - ?, 12.1.1901.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Eirola, 'Uukwambi Incident', p 85. This led to skirmishes with so-called Feldherero over waterholes in areas which had previously not been marked by tension: NAN ZBU WII k5, Bezirksamt Outjo - Kaiserl. Gouvernement, 1.9.1903.

enemies of the Rhenish mission in Oukwanyama used this to stoke up anti-Christian hostility.³⁸³

In conclusion, the vigour of trade networks created by a late but dynamic merchant capital in the region posed problems for both Germany and Portugal. It drew them to intervene in Ovamboland, but supplied the Ovambo with arms which made them hesitant to do so. Up until the resolution of her financial crisis in 1902, Portugal was constantly forced to acknowledge her impotence in extending her frontiers of occupation to Ovamboland. The Germans, likewise, noted in 1901:

If German protective hegemony is extended to Ovambo, in reality it has not passed over this neutral zone [the Thirstbelt separating Hereroland from Ovambo] and the proud Ovambo chiefs in their palisaded stockades are at least as powerful as the German Kaiser.³⁸⁴

³⁸³ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Bericht über eine in Norden des Deutsch-Südwestafrikanischen Schutzgebietes ausgeführte Reise, ca 1902-3.

³⁸⁴ NAN ZBU J XIII B3, Bericht über die Reise von Oberleutnant von Winckler, August - November 1901.

CHAPTER 4

COLONIAL ENCIRCLEMENT, ca 1900-1914

Overview

Between 1904 and 1914 Portuguese and German colonial frontiers encircled Ovamboland. Only Ombandja and Evale were occupied by the Portuguese before 1914; the main conquest came in 1915-17. This chapter charts the trajectories of German and Portuguese colonialism, which differed significantly, and the processes taking shape within Ovambo polities, under new pressures from colonial subjugation occurring on their peripheries, notably in Ombandja and Hereroland.

In 1900 the claims of both colonial powers over frontier areas were precarious, but Portugal gave priority to the occupation of her southern border area, whereas Germany did not. The new Windhoek administration was struggling to control the *Schutzgebiet* proper, let alone the populous and well-armed Ovambo in the far north.¹ Not even labour was a vital economic consideration until after 1904, for until then settler economic activity was confined largely to trade and small-scale pastoral undertakings.² The protectorate's mineral potential had barely been explored, and infrastructural and public works programmes were minimal. The need for labour was so small that in 1903 the German authorities allowed the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association to recruit over 1,000 workers to the Rand mines.³ Such German contacts as took place in Ovamboland centred on Ondonga which was the main interface with the *Schutzgebiet*. Oukwanyama was of concern

¹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 80.

² *Ibid.*, p 62.

³ Beinart, 'Jamani', p 169; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 231.

because it straddled the ever-disputed boundary with the Portuguese and attracted rival officials, traders and later labour recruiters and famine relief programmes.⁴

By contrast, Portugal aimed to occupy the entire southern Angolan interior, rule it directly, collect 'tribute' (later taxation) and extract labour, by force if necessary. Two factors drew the Portuguese authorities towards occupation of the Kunene-Kavango inter-riverine area: first, the threat posed by Germany;⁵ second, the widespread impact of Kwanyama (and to a lesser extent Mbandja) raiding, which challenged Portuguese authority in Onkhumbi and the Huila highlands.⁶

Symptomatic of colonial rivalry in Oukwanyama were the activities of missionaries, who, while having their own agendas, largely identified with the colonial powers, Catholics with Portuguese and Lutherans with Germans. Missionaries were crucial in the informal penetration of both powers in Ovamboland.⁷ In 1899 Lisbon backed the Spiritan mission's efforts to re-establish a presence in Oukwanyama following the disaster of 1885. King Weyulu welcomed them in 1900.⁸ His support was vital, for *omalenga* patently resented the mission presence. The Spiritans believed this was because they had cut into a profitable enterprise; *omalenga* were resentful at having to return without ransom captives taken in Catoco. Moreover, the Spiritans had pressurised Weyulu to return 30 head of cattle stolen from a Benguella company.⁹

⁴ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 80.

⁵ AHU Repartição Militar No 1014, Gerais de Angola 3/150 No 979, Governador Luanda - Ultramar, 24.8.1903; Aguiar - Ultramar, 27.1.1903; AHU Maço 976, Governador Geral - Ultramar, 20.4.1904; AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 5.5.1904; 476-B-IV, Lecomte - TRP, 24.11.1907; BG 23 1905-6, pp 272-3; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, pp 15-6.

⁶ AHU Repartição Militar No 1014, Gerais de Angola 3/150 No 979, ? - Governador Geral, 4.5.1905; AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 7.10.1903; Blanc - Faugère, 23.11.1903; Blanc - Faugère, 22.12.1903; Blanc - Faugère, 6.2.1904; Blanc - Faugère, 7.4.1904; CNDIH cx 5044, 31.8.2, Chefe Humbe, Relatório, 11.6.1904.

⁷ CNDIH cx 5044/31.8.2, Chefe Humbe - Governador Huila, 2.10.1908.

⁸ AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte - Pascal, 23.8.1900.

⁹ AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte - Pascal, 24.5.1902.

The presence of missionaries proved diplomatically useful to Ovambo leaders. Both Catholics and Protestants prevented the symbolic hoisting of flags of the rival colonial powers during official visits in Oukwanyama.¹⁰

The Portuguese occupation of the frontier was delayed by financial crises in Lisbon and the prior need to bar Kwanyama raids by colonising the intervening chiefdoms. In every aspect, whether penetration or occupation, Portugal was manifestly weak. She had not yet undergone an industrial revolution and her imperialism remained largely extractive. Unlike Britain, France and Germany, who had converted the wealth accumulated from mercantilism into productive investment and whose imperialism was in large part premised on this economic transformation, Portugal continued to depend on accumulating wealth through 'pillage and unequal exchange'.¹¹ She also depended on capital from abroad for larger projects needing investment, especially railways.¹² The protectionist economic system imposed in Angola until 1910 benefited Lisbon manufacturers and 'merchant princes' at the cost of stifling local entrepreneurs. But in their turn, local traders benefitted from Lisbon's laxity in enforcing international restrictions on the sale of firearms and alcohol and ending the barely disguised slave trade to São Tomé and the Gulf of Guinea.¹³

Economic backwardness had implications for occupation. Portugal asserted that the interior of Angola was occupied, but in reality control did not extend beyond one tenth of the territory. Up-country officials received insufficient pay, frequently had to trade to survive and 'relied on slave soldiers, unreliable militia forces, and the threat of punitive expeditions in order to exercise a precarious and fluctuating authority.'¹⁴ Abuses against

¹⁰ AGCSSp 476-B-II, Lecomte - Rooney, 17.7.1901; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 1*, pp 24-5.

¹¹ Munslow, *Mozambique*, p 5.

¹² An example was the Benguela Railway Company, where share and loan capital was raised almost entirely in Britain. Clarence-Smith, 'Capital accumulation', p 166.

¹³ Clarence-Smith, 'Capital accumulation', pp 164-7; idem, *Slaves*, p 28.

¹⁴ Clarence-Smith, 'Capital accumulation', p 172.

African societies by traders,¹⁵ officials¹⁶ and discontented soldiery led to frequent and violent revolts, notably the 1897-8 Nkhumbi¹⁷ and 1902 Bailundo revolts.¹⁸

Occupation itself was redolent of crisis management. It was usually no more than 'loose suzerainty',¹⁹ dependent on the collaboration of African leaders. Portuguese troops barricaded themselves within a line of forts across the south, in a sea of hostile peoples. One official admitted that local animosity was so great that it was more dangerous to be inside these forts than outside.²⁰ This defensiveness proved largely self-defeating, even before the Portuguese launched their first attempt to subjugate the Mbandja and Kwanyama. Political engineering was pursued, certainly, but communities left to the mercies of the newly-constituted chiefs frequently rebelled. 'The Portuguese avenge disasters, they do not try to prevent them.'²¹ Angola in fact represented Portugal's 'nightmare colony': revolt and resistance necessitated no less than 150 military campaigns between 1879 and 1926.²² The south became particularly notorious.

Ovambo leaders had much opportunity to grasp the implications of Portuguese rule on their peripheries. It was a matter of time before their great push south came. The commander in Humbe, de Aguiar, was known to be eagerly awaiting permission from Lisbon. The whole of 1903 and early 1904 was filled with rumours and speculation about a great military expedition.²³ By February 1904, Catholic missionaries completed the evacuation of their

¹⁵ CNDIH cx 5044/31.8.2, Chefe Humbe - ?, Relatório, 11.6.1904.

¹⁶ See AHU 1R 2S P21, Relatório: Projecto da reorganização administrativa de Benguela, 9.12.1901.

¹⁷ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 437-42.

¹⁸ Wheeler and Christensen, 'To Rise with One Mind', pp 61-3.

¹⁹ Clarence-Smith, 'Capital accumulation', pp 172-3.

²⁰ AHU Maço 976, Chefe Humbe - ?, Relatório, June-July 1904.

²¹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 442.

²² *Ibid*, pp 611-2.

²³ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 9.8.1904; BG 23 1905-6, p 269; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 449.

small Kwanyama congregation towards Evale, following official Portuguese warnings. Invasion appeared increasingly imminent.²⁴

Effects of the Herero-Nama rebellions, 1904-07

At this juncture, developments in the German *Schutzgebiet* suddenly turned the attention of Ovambo leaders southwards. In 1904 the Herero rebelled against the Germans²⁵ and sent calls for action to the Ndonga king Kambonde and through him to other Ovambo leaders.²⁶ The impact of the message was electric: some mobilisation took place, Finnish missionaries in Ondonga were threatened and there was talk of an Ndonga attack on the German station at Okaukweyo. Cooler heads prevailed and Kambonde waited to see how events transpired in Hereroland. When the news reached Oukwanyama Weyulu declined to support the Herero, though strong anti-German sentiments were directed against local Rhenish missionaries.²⁷

However, Kambonde's more aggressive brother Nehale Iya Mpingana acted unilaterally.²⁸ *De facto* ruler of eastern Ondonga,²⁹ he had been irked by the presence a small German fort at Namutoni in the south-east of his territory, erected in 1903. On 28 January 1904 Nehale's fighters attacked the fort, which housed only one sergeant, three soldiers, three farmers seeking protection,³⁰ and a considerable number of cattle.³¹ German fire drove off the

²⁴ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 21.2.1904; Lecomte - Pascal, 17.4.1904; Blanc - Faugère, 8.5.1904; Blanc - Faugère, 24.5.1904.

²⁵ Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, p 132.

²⁶ RMG *Berichte* 1904, p 265.

²⁷ Eirola, 'Reservation', p 6.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp 6-7; RMG *Berichte* 1904, p 265.

²⁹ Eirola, 'Reservation', p 2; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 222.

³⁰ Eirola, 'Reservation', p 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp 6-7; interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Okadhina, Ondonga, 5.11.1989; interview with Adolf Ambambi, Oshigambo, 23.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 131).

attackers but shortage of ammunition led the defenders to escape under cover of darkness. Nehale then sent his fighters back to occupy the fort.³²

In response, the Germans strengthened their garrison at Outjo to secure their northern flank. Through Finnish and Rhenish missionaries they paid close attention to possible Ovambo support for the Herero. After their defeat at the battle of Waterburg, many Herero headed north as refugees.³³ Rumours suggested that Samuel Maherero with a large party passed briefly into eastern Ondonga and sought asylum from Nehale, which the latter refused.³⁴ The son of chief Kambazembi, Salatiel, and his followers remained some months in eastern Ondonga.³⁵ Later, many were given refuge by the Ngandjera king, Tshanika, south of the main Ngandjera settlements.³⁶

Effectively, Germany had its hands full with the rebellions in the south, which continued when the Nama launched their revolt.³⁷ Close attention was paid to arms smuggling through Angola, which might reach the Herero,³⁸ but no Ovambo actions were serious enough to alter the German policy of non-occupation.³⁹ In the longer term however, Nehale's action certainly had an influence. The Germans intervened in the Ndonga succession a few years later to support a Christian candidate and promote a unitary Ndonga state.⁴⁰

Late in 1904 there was consternation in Ovamboland at the incontrovertible signs of the approaching Portuguese expedition. Lecomte visited Oukwanyama in July⁴¹ and concluded that the Kwanyama were little

³² Eirola, 'Reservation', p 8; N. Mossolow, *The History of Namutoni* (Windhoek, 1971), pp 42-5.

³³ Eirola, 'Reservation', p 22; *RMG Berichte* 1904, p 265.

³⁴ Eirola, 'Reservation', p 23.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 22-3; *RMG Berichte* 1904, p 265.

³⁶ NAN ZBU JXIII b3 B4, Wangenheim, Nachrichten aus dem Amboland, 13.4.1906; Eirola, 'Reservation', p 26.

³⁷ Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, p 176 et passim.

³⁸ NAN ZBU A1H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 16.8.1904.

³⁹ Eirola, 'Reservation', pp 48-9. The fact that the Ndonga offered no further help to the Herero made Spiritan missionaries in Angola believe the Germans had severely punished them. AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 23.4.1904.

⁴⁰ NAN ZBU WII k3, Franke - Gouverneur, 14.10.1908.

⁴¹ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 12.7.1904; Blanc - Faugère, 24-25.6.1904.

inclined to confront European troops.⁴² The missionary sent Lisbon detailed instructions on the best methods to approach and conquer Oukwanyama,⁴³ advice which was later ignored. When Weyulu ya Hedimbi died unexpectedly in mid-September 1904, in a ritual regicide upon his sudden lapse into serious ill-health,⁴⁴ Oukwanyama became very cut off from the outside world. During the long months of mourning affairs in the polity became introverted,⁴⁵ despite the gathering clouds of war across the Kunene river and further calls from Nehale to attack German stations in December 1904.⁴⁶

1904: Mbandja victory against the Portuguese

De Aguiar's large expeditionary force ignored Lecomte's advice to attack Oukwanyama via Evale,⁴⁷ choosing the direct route into Ombandja.⁴⁸ Neither did the expedition employ experienced Boer auxiliaries, whose mobility and scouting skills had always proved an asset to Portuguese military expeditions.⁴⁹ These were early symptoms of the laxity which led to what Pélissier calls '*une défaite explicable*.'⁵⁰ Lesser Ombandja, under King

⁴² AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 20.8.1904.

⁴³ Ernesto Lecomte, 'Duas Cartas do missionário Ernesto Lecomte', *Portugal em Africa*, No 132, Dez 1904, p 748.

⁴⁴ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 23.11.1904.

⁴⁵ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Haussleiter (RMG) - Kolonial Abteilung, 15.12.1904.

⁴⁶ RMG *Berichte* 1905, p 93.

⁴⁷ Ernesto Lecomte, 'Duas Cartas do missionário Ernesto Lecomte,' *Portugal em Africa*, No 132, Dezembro 1904, p 748.

⁴⁸ AHU Repartição Militar No 1014, Gerais de Angola 3/150 No 979, Relatório das operações 19-25.9.1904. The Portuguese term for the Mbandja was Cuamato, and the two kingships were called Cuamato Pequeno and Cuamato Grande, signifying Lesser and Greater Ombandja respectively. The Ovambo referred to the two kingships according to the place names of the two royal residences: Ombandja of Naluheke, and Ombandja of Omongu. Cuamato Pequeno here refers to Ombandja of Omongu. See maps Appendix 2 and Appendix 3.

⁴⁹ NAN A233 William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 2, passim.

⁵⁰ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 451.

Ikerá, had considerable recent experience of raiding and warfare and included a small but skilled group of marksmen.⁵¹

The Portuguese crossed the Kunene at Pembe on 19 September 1904.⁵² Guerrillas badgered the expeditionary body, killing the transport oxen and horses as they crossed the Kunene.⁵³ For the next four days the Mbandja exploited their terrain, harrying the Portuguese encampment but avoiding confrontation. On 25 September de Aguiar sent a 500-strong contingent to probe their way ahead.⁵⁴ Potentially fatal oversights were committed: the artillery was not checked⁵⁵ and the guide, an Mbundu serving penal sentence in Humbe, was unfamiliar with Mbandja terrain.⁵⁶

The party's advance was the opportunity for which the Mbandja were well-prepared. The guide led the detachment into a clearing known locally as Umpungu, where a heavy ambush had been laid.⁵⁷ Mbandja marksmen waiting in the trees soon picked off many officers and cavalry mounts. Panic ensued and the black auxiliaries retreated.⁵⁸ Mbandja fighters emerged from their cover and engaged in hand-to-hand combat. The Portuguese troops were overwhelmed; no prisoners were taken.⁵⁹ Later Portuguese reports allege that Mbandja women emerged to join in the slaughter of fleeing Portuguese soldiers.⁶⁰

The remnants raced back to de Aguiar's encampment by the Kunene. Mistaken for the enemy, they were met with a grenade attack from their own

⁵¹ Castro, *Campanha*, p 169.

⁵² For a full military account, see AHU Maço 976, *Desastre das operações na Cuanhama*, 1904, Documentos 1-19.

⁵³ AHU Repartição Militar No 1014, *Gerais de Angola* 3/150 No 979, *Relatório das operações 19-25.9.1904*; René Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 218.

⁵⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 451.

⁵⁵ AHU Maço 976, *Despoimentos sobre as causas*, n.d.

⁵⁶ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 451.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p 452.

⁵⁸ AHU Repartição Militar No 1014, *Gerais de Angola* 3/150 No 979, *Relatório das operações 19-25.9.1904*.

⁵⁹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 452; oral sources suggest prisoners may have been taken and later killed in captivity. Interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 193).

⁶⁰ Castro, *Campanha*, p 191.

side. A further twenty-five were killed.⁶¹ Once they realised the danger of being overrun by the Mbandja themselves, the remaining corps of the expedition under de Aguiar decided to retreat across the Kunene river the same day, leaving those still floundering behind to their fate.⁶² The expedition made no further advance towards the Umpungu clearing, where not only their dead lay in the field but two cannon, two transport vehicles with ammunition and hundreds of rifles.⁶³ The expedition fell back on the fortress of Humbe; only with difficulty did de Aguiar prevent his officers from abandoning this position as well.⁶⁴ Over three hundred were dead and missing from the day's *débâcle*.⁶⁵

The whole episode was important for what it reveals about the Mbandja and for the trauma experienced by Portuguese imperialism. The Mbandja were among the most active Ovambo raiders, on a par with the Kwanyama. But internal conditions in the Mbandja polities differed significantly from the Kwanyama. Among the latter, trade with external agents of merchant capital led to economic reorientation, which overloaded internal mechanisms of surplus appropriation and intensified external raiding. The impact of merchant capital among the Kwanyama both reinforced central kingships and exacerbated tensions between kings and *omalenga* and between dominant and subordinate social groups. The peculiarities of the Mbandja case, however, do not allow a crude application of this Kwanyama 'model.' Despite Portuguese claims that the Mbandja were heavily armed,⁶⁶ they were no more than minimally armed with modern rifles, for they had shut out foreign traders, missionaries and hunters, after an

⁶¹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 452.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p 453.

⁶³ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Schroder, Auszüge aus der Defeza de Angola, 11.1.1905.

⁶⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 453.

⁶⁵ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 24.10.1904; Blanc - Faugère, 24.10.1904; BG 23 1905-6, p 271; NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 8.11.1904; Schroder, Auszüge aus der Defeza de Angola, 11.1.1905.

⁶⁶ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 452, endorses this inaccurate Portuguese view.

initial show of interest.⁶⁷ The Portuguese were in fact defeated by an African army overwhelmingly equipped with technologically inferior weapons. Rather, Mbandja raiding⁶⁸ resulted from indirect contact with merchant capital which was restructuring societies in very close proximity to them. The Mbandja banned white traders, but there is nothing to suggest they excluded black traders, such as Mbangala middlemen acting for Portuguese interests. The main source of weapons, however, was probably inter-Ovambo trade.⁶⁹ For this, they would certainly have required cattle, possibly captives, to be passed on to polities directly involved in the trade. In terms of internal politics, moreover, Mbandja polities, like Uukwambi, may have attempted to keep power centralised by preventing *omalenga* seizing new initiatives offered by trade with well-capitalised whites. It is not certain how far *omalenga* in Mbandja polities controlled raiding parties; it is likely kings kept a tight grip. If so, larger polities were more subject to centrifugal forces and medium-sized polities in the centre of the floodplain seemed to escape the worst of decentralising pulls. In sum, in 1904 when the Mbandja faced Portuguese invasion, to outward appearances they offered a united resistance. This unity, and its later prising apart in the more successful campaign of 1907 by Portugal, foreshadowed the Kwanyama experience of 1915-17.

For the Portuguese, the disaster at Pembe was a national dishonour.⁷⁰ In Pélissier's military-historical account, the defeat was on the same scale as Adowa and Isandhlwana. Certainly nothing of similar magnitude occurred in any other Portuguese colonial campaign in Africa.⁷¹ It was especially demoralising⁷² when juxtaposed with the German victory six weeks

⁶⁷ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

⁶⁸ CNDIH cx 5048/32.1.8, Governador Huila, Relatório, 21.2.1902.

⁶⁹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 452; Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 218.

⁷⁰ AHU Maço 976, Governador Geral - Ultramar, 19.10.1904; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 454.

⁷¹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 453; Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 218; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 2.

⁷² AHU Maço 976, *Desastre na Cuanhama 1904: despoimentos sobre as causas*, n.d.

previously over the rebellious Herero at Waterburg.⁷³ The Mbandja victory helps to explain many aspects of later Portuguese campaigns: the religious mass said at the grave of Pembe victims in 1907 after Ombandja was occupied;⁷⁴ the demonisation of both the Mbandja and Kwanyama and the obsession with their conquest, fostered by the rise of a huge popular discourse on southern Angola in the press and literature in Portugal;⁷⁵ and the later use of terror and atrocities especially in 1915, despite new attitudes towards colonialism under the Republican government.

In the short term the urgent task for the Portuguese was damage limitation. De Aguiar, erstwhile Governor of Huila and commandant of the ill-fated expedition, was transferred to the governorship of Mossamedes.⁷⁶ Captain of General Staff Alves Roçadas was recalled from service in India and installed as Governor of Huila province.⁷⁷ He was cautious and thorough. While three years of delay and financial deliberation prevented the arrival of a new expeditionary force, he made full use of remaining resources to subdue the peripheries of Ovamboland.

Locally the Mbandja victory had repercussions on the morale of African groups in Ovamboland, across the Kunene and as far as the Huila plateau. The Mbandja threat to cross the Kunene and attack the fortress at Humbe struck a sympathetic chord among subjugated groups.⁷⁸ Spiritan sources record the atmosphere of pride and 'turbulence' affecting the communities around Humbe.⁷⁹ Ombandja sealed itself off from all foreign access. Inflammatory messages were passed on to the Portuguese, such as on

⁷³ Though prior to this the Germans were seen to be having great trouble in coping with the Herero uprising and Samuel Maherero's fame had spread to southern Angola. See BG 23 1905-6, p 298.

⁷⁴ Castro, *Campanha*, pp 255-66.

⁷⁵ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 482.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p 456.

⁷⁷ Henrique Pires Monteiro, *Alves Roçadas*, *Cadernos Coloniais* No 6 (Lisbon, n.d.), p 9.

⁷⁸ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 456.

⁷⁹ BG 23 1905-6, p 304.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p 305.

Roçadas' return from Mulondo, when the Mbandja taunted him that he had better 'come and leave his rifles in Ombandja rather than Mulondo'.⁸⁰

Materially the 1904 *débâcle* provided the means for future resistance. Hundreds of modern rifles were gathered from the battlefield, as well as ammunition and two cannons, which made Mbandja armed strength and local arms-trading power impressive. These arms entered the hitherto limited trade networks among the more marginal Ovambo communities. For instance the Mbalantu for the first time gained access to large numbers of rifles.⁸¹

In Oukwanyama Genié noted that while the Kwanyama king Nande and his brother Hamalua revelled in this setback for whites,⁸² in their external contacts they remained extremely cautious and avoided taking open part with the newly-won Mbandja glory.⁸³ The balance of power in Ovamboland had been tipped in favour of Ombandja, to the detriment of Kwanyama hegemony in the north. Another source of tension was that the exiled uncle of Nande, a rival claimant to the Kwanyama kingship, Kanime, had taken refuge in Ombandja, after long years on the fringes of various communities.⁸⁴

The region as a whole showed some ferment.⁸⁵ Cassinga was among the first to experience local revolt, and in January 1905 the mines were reported temporarily closed.⁸⁶ But it was primarily the plateau, with its relatively small Ngambwe anti-colonial defiance, that Roçadas needed to subjugate. The economic way to contain the situation was for Roçadas to fall back on the low-intensity methods of Artur de Paiva,⁸⁷ utilising left-over troops from the 1904 expeditionary force. The Ngambwe were in revolt, but

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Interview with Simeon Heita, Onawa, 20.2.1990.

⁸² AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 25.11.1904; Blanc - Faugère, 23.11.1904.

⁸³ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 14.11.1906; BG 23 1905-6, pp 271-2.

⁸⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 459.

⁸⁵ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Riedlinger, 24.3.1905.

⁸⁶ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 23.1.1905.

⁸⁷ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 457.

Roçadas first put Mulondo to fire.⁸⁸ Roçadas also sent in two soundings to Ombandja, one was severely repulsed and the second, a Boer contingent to Greater Ombandja, attempted only a cattle raid.⁸⁹

Roçadas then crushed the Ngambwe unrest in Pocolo against their Portuguese-installed chief,⁹⁰ killing 200 Ngambwe and seizing thousands of cattle. This area too was razed and Roçadas re-entered Chibia on 7 December 1905, secure that Portuguese occupation on the western Kunene was re-established.⁹¹ The long-standing Nkhumbi rebel Lahuna, who attempted to ambush some auxiliaries, was captured and deported with his brother to Luanda, thence probably to Cabo Verde.⁹²

This 'ferment' of 1905-6 comprised both localised revolts emboldened by the Mbandja victory and their corollary, Portuguese reprisals and freebooting.⁹³ According to the Spiritans, during 1905-06 the environs of Huila saw unprecedented disorder and pillage, caused by Portuguese forays with auxiliaries, supposedly the annual 'punitive expedition' against insubordinate subjects.⁹⁴ Some small-scale internecine conflict was also evident, as Lecomte reported in September 1905 when he entered the Ovambo floodplain on his way to visit Nande.

Several native villages have been destroyed, people taken, even from amongst our Christians... These pillages, these raids are due to feuds among the blacks, who not being able to avenge themselves directly on others, go in search of Kwanyama

⁸⁸ Up to two hundred and fifty Mulondo were killed, 600 taken prisoner, and the relatively small number of cattle taken was 400. Monteiro, *Roçadas*, pp 19-23; AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 6.11.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 25.11.1905; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 458.

⁸⁹ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 4.11.1906; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 461-2.

⁹⁰ The maverick Oorlog, later appointed a chief in Kaoko by South Africa, supported this rebellion led by Kandere, the nephew of the Portuguese chief, referred to simply as Dom João. Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 459.

⁹¹ Monteiro, *Roçadas*, p 23; see also BG 24 1907-8, p 480 for 'terrorisation' tactics by the Portuguese.

⁹² Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 459.

⁹³ BG 24 1907-8, p 457.

⁹⁴ BG 23 1905-6, p 253.

warbands. The latter ask no more than to take cattle, with which to buy their horses and precision rifles.⁹⁵

Agents in the interstices

The tenuousness of Portuguese control over southern Angolan populations is best seen in the interstices which lay between areas they controlled and those subject to independent states. Destabilisation from several decades of mercantile penetration and the advance of colonisation appeared in an extreme form in these regions. The 'moving frontier of violence', especially characteristic of the slave trade, was increasingly pent up: the physical spaces between floodplain and Kunene polities offered one outlet.

The interstices were the ideal locations for ambushes and robbery. When an official party under João de Almeida travelled through the interstices of northern Ovamboland in 1906, he reported 'constant forays' between Mbandja and Kwanyama.⁹⁶ Mbandja groups appeared strong enough to control parts of the forest belt between the polities and ban Kwanyama access, making it dangerous for de Almeida's party with its Kwanyama guides. According to de Almeida, Mbandja waited in these zones to rob traders returning to the Kunene from Oukwanyama. When he journeyed on to Evale, he reported that the Vale people hid their cattle from raiders.⁹⁷

Nobody controlled these interstitial areas, neither Ovambo kings nor the Portuguese. They had become homes for refugees, dissidents and the

⁹⁵ AGCSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Pascal, 28.9.1905.

⁹⁶ João de Almeida, *Relatórios das Missões ao Cuanhama e Evale* (Lisbon, 1907), p 7.

⁹⁷ De Almeida, *Relatórios*, p 34.

socially victimised. This was largely why a Catholic mission was established between Evale and Oukwanyama.⁹⁸

The Blacks are distancing themselves more and more from the royal residences, and taking themselves towards the frontiers, in the virgin forests, where defence is easier and more effective.⁹⁹

Especially when they possessed modern arms, marginalised people survived for years in these interstices. Prominent among them were the dissident *élite*, autonomous entrepreneurs who formed small raiding units and clientage networks.¹⁰⁰

By tracing the activities of these agents, this section examines the experience of proximity to Portuguese colonialism. This thesis has up to now dwelt on negative aspects of the Portuguese presence - the use of military force and the exaction of labour and 'tribute' or taxes - because these negative features had the most bearing on peripheral areas like Ovamboland, not yet under direct Portuguese rule. The subtleties of response and forms of everyday interaction by occupied peoples and those operating on the margins have been absent from the account so far.

Omalenga pushed into the interstices could activate local networks of support through their military resources, which enabled them to obtain cattle with which to patronise adherents. Several, like the famous Makili, could resist punitive actions by kings.¹⁰¹ There is little record of Makili's origins or his beginnings as an outlaw operating on the 'liquid frontier' of the south.¹⁰² In 1905, a Portuguese officer from Humbe fort set out to capture this

⁹⁸ The Spiritans also established a mission in a northern Oukwanyama area abandoned by Kwanyama because of raids by neighbouring groups. See BG 23 1905-6, p 269.

⁹⁹ BG 24 1907-8, p 455.

¹⁰⁰ De Almeida, *Relatórios*, p 8.

¹⁰¹ Makili also appears as Makir, or Maquir, in Portuguese documentation. De Almeida, *Relatórios*, p 8.

¹⁰² CNDIH cx 5048, 32.1.10, Veiga - Governador, 13.6.1905. The phrase is Pélissier's; *Guerres Grises*, p 445.

notorious *salteador*.¹⁰³ The officer uncovered a comprehensive network of Makili's clients among the smaller communities along the western bank of the Kunene, starting in Kafu. So great was the local awe of Makili that forty men were considered a minimum with which to tackle him. The force raided several of his clients, seizing cattle, before locating Makili's residence, but there a contingent led by another Kwanyama *elenga*, Kanime, fired on the party. A visit to another bandit Autunta's residence met with the same reaction; the people here were not local but Kwanyama, Mbandja and Vale exiles. The elusive Makili himself offers a unique view of the 'ambitious upstart';¹⁰⁴ acquiring and circulating goods outside the established networks of prestations and politics. Laws of survival in the interstices dictated that if an *elenga* built up a following, he could not display them. Mobility was precious. He therefore kept a string of clients in different places.

The most dominant force within these interstices however were the ubiquitous warbands, which stepped up attacks against their weaker northern neighbours after 1904.¹⁰⁵ Both the Nkhumbi and Dongoena communities had been disarmed by the Portuguese and were very vulnerable to attacks by Mbandja and Kwanyama raiders. Mission settlements were not exempt. Many raids took place in 1905, among them another attack on the Catholic mission at Catoco.¹⁰⁶ After Weyulu's undertaking to Lecomte to curb raiding, this upsurge suggests that the observations of Rhenish missionaries, that Nande was a 'shadow king' and 'power has slipped out of his hands and gone over to the *omalenga*',¹⁰⁷ were accurate.

¹⁰³ *Salteador* - bandit. CNDIH cx 5048/32.1.10, Oliveira -?, Relatório, 7.6.1905.

¹⁰⁴ Miller, *Way of death*, p 71-2.

¹⁰⁵ BG 24 1907-8, p 449.

¹⁰⁶ AGCSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - André, 28.5.1905; Lecomte - Pascal, 3.9.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 24.5.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 10.6.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 23.6.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 22.7.1905; Blanc - ?, 26.4.1906; Blanc - ?, 29.5.1906; Blanc - Faugère, 6.9.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 7.10.1905; Blanc - Faugère, 25.11.1905; Blanc - ?, 4.11.1906.

¹⁰⁷ AVEM c/k 7 No 9, Sckär, Beitrag zu den Sitten, 1899.

During the next year however, external raiding by *omalenga* appeared to decrease. Not only did Portuguese resistance become more effective, but indirect colonial and missionary pressure on kingship had become more insistent. These curbs on external raiding increased the incentive to raid internally, which slackening central royal control did little to check. The Kwanyama polity was under acute pressure; tendencies towards fragmentation were increasing.

Externally, Nande's reign was marked by increased informal pressure from both Portuguese and German official visits. The Germans showed that their agenda towards the Ovambo 'reserve' after the rebellions in the south was changing; migrant labour was now a priority. The Portuguese had even greater urgency in sending an official delegation to Oukwanyama, led by João de Almeida.¹⁰⁸ This was in response to the German establishment of a military post on the border with Angola, in Oukwangali on the Kavango river,¹⁰⁹ an area where the Kwanyama claimed tribute.¹¹⁰ But Portuguese overtures to Nande also fitted into Roçadas' overall strategy in southern Angola after the 1904 *débâcle*. It was an attempt at peaceful penetration.

In return for Portuguese protection from German attack,¹¹¹ de Almeida presented Nande with demands for a fort in Kwanyama territory, his military assistance against other Ovambo states, a cessation of raiding and Kwanyama labour for railway construction to the north.¹¹² In view of the universal perception of the Portuguese as weak and humiliated after 1904,¹¹³ these

¹⁰⁸ Monteiro, *Roçadas*, p 24.

¹⁰⁹ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 6.11.1905; for the Portuguese response, see AGCSSp 476-B-IV, Blanc - TRP, 8.10.1908.

¹¹⁰ AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 7.1.1906.

¹¹¹ De Almeida, *Relatórios*, p 4. Spiritan missionaries believed the Kwanyama ruling section, if forced to choose, would prefer a Portuguese yoke because, as a result of the Herero rebellion and the aggrandisement of Mbandja military repute which had checked the Portuguese, the latter were perceived as weaker colonisers. AGCSSp 475-B-III, Blanc - Faugère, 7.1.1906.

¹¹² De Almeida, *Relatórios*, pp 17-8.

¹¹³ This was the case even before 1904. See AGCSSp 475-B-III, Lecomte - Pascal, 20.8.1904; Lecomte - Pascal, 25.6.1905.

demands were unrealistic if not farcical. While 'distrustful and perplexed', Nande handled the exchange cautiously. He was closely advised by the *elenga* Noyoma, a son of Mweshipandeka.¹¹⁴ His brother Hamalua barely hid his dissatisfaction at Nande's verbal concessions¹¹⁵ to de Almeida's military proposals. Regarding migrant labour however, the king conceded nothing. The overall significance of Nande's agreement with de Almeida was very limited, especially when he later reached a similar agreement with the Germans which included concessions on migrant labour to the south in return for German protection.¹¹⁶ Nande's concessions to the Portuguese were probably made in the expectation of their being too weak to enforce the agreement. He clearly sought to avoid provoking either Portugal or Germany and manoeuvred diplomatically between the two.

De Almeida achieved even less when he travelled on to Evale. The supposedly pro-Portuguese leader Kavangela refused to see him and the party had an uncomfortable exit.¹¹⁷ With insufficient military backing, Portuguese influence in Ovambo polities remained negligible.

Portuguese occupation of Ombandja, 1907

In June 1907, the military expedition to avenge the Portuguese humiliation of 1904 finally assembled at Fort Roçadas on the Kunene river.¹¹⁸ It was large: 2291 regular army troops, mostly from Portugal, plus auxiliaries.¹¹⁹ Communication was now revolutionised by a telegraph from Fort Roçadas. Preparations by Eduardo Marques and Luna de Carvalho in

¹¹⁴ De Almeida, *Relatórios*, pp 17 and 24.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 17.

¹¹⁶ NAN ZBU WII k2 Bd 3, Franke - Gouverneur, 14.10.1908.

¹¹⁷ De Almeida, *Relatórios*, pp 34-7.

¹¹⁸ For an illustration of military penetration in 1907 see map, Appendix 3.

¹¹⁹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 463.

Onkhumbi bore fruit. The guide who led the expedition, Kalipalula,¹²⁰ a former claimant to the Mbandja kingship at Naluheke,¹²¹ was initially a powerful asset. The communities living along the Kunene river had also been subdued by prior operations.¹²²

The expedition left Fort Roçadas on 26 August on a route further north than that attempted in 1904, heading directly for the king's *embala* at Lesser Ombandja. Until the column reached a clearing at Mufilo, no direct attack was made. The only evidence of the enemy, 'warlike and disposed to defend his invaded territory with tenacity and ferocity',¹²³ were the snipers who avoided contact and made use of bush cover. The Mbandja and their allies appeared to be attempting to lure the Portuguese into another ambush; morale in the column began to sink.

On 27 August a decisive encounter occurred at Mufilo. The Portuguese formed a square, which held off attack for five hours.¹²⁴ The Portuguese estimate of between twenty and twenty-five thousand Ovambo troops in the forest cover was probably exaggerated, as were their claims that the Ovambo disposed of six thousand rifles.¹²⁵ But Mbandja ranks were stiffened by large contingents of Kwanyama¹²⁶ led by the *omalenga* Makili and Kalola and smaller numbers of Kwambi, Mbalantu, Hinga and Nkhumbi.¹²⁷ The Mufilo battle forced the Ovambo to expend precious reserves of ammunition, which probably turned the tide.¹²⁸ The Kwanyama began to withdraw; this was no easy victory. Moreover the Mbandja had run short of cattle to obtain more ammunition and feed non-Mbandja fighting men.¹²⁹ The Portuguese later

¹²⁰ Castro, *Campanha*, p 41.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp 228-30.

¹²² BG 24 1907-08, p 480.

¹²³ Castro, *Campanha*, p 57.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 64; Monteiro, *Roçadas*, pp 24-6.

¹²⁵ David Martins de Lima, *A campanha dos cuamatos* (Lisbon, 1908), p 132; Castro, *Campanha*, p 69.

¹²⁶ Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 24.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p 132; Castro, *Campanha*, pp 69 and 80.

¹²⁸ Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 167.

¹²⁹ Castro, *Campanha*, p 129.

learned that a contingent of Vale fighters on its way to join the Mbandja heard of the defeat at Mufilo and turned back.¹³⁰ Fifteen died on the Portuguese side; the Ovambo losses were later found to have been heavy.¹³¹

The Portuguese advanced on 28 August and secured their position at Aucongo.¹³² Mbandja attacks were launched against the place on 29 August and particularly audacious attempts were made on 2 and 4 September; 13 more Portuguese dead and 34 wounded were sustained.¹³³ Portuguese progress was difficult but resistance was plainly unable to re-group for another decisive encounter like Mufilo. On 10 September the column recommenced its march against an increasingly shadowy enemy, whom they judged vigilant but afraid to attack. On the 13th the column marched into a second trap at Damekero, but the Mbandja fell back.¹³⁴ The Portuguese believed that at this point the Mbandja king Sheetekela lost support among his own people, for they now advanced without much opposition.¹³⁵ They proceeded along the main *oshana* towards Sheetekela's *embala*, via Inyoka. On 21 September the water-holes belonging to Sheetekela were seized. Opposition was now fragmented. Auxiliaries seized cattle and burned homesteads and grain stores.¹³⁶ The habitations found were nearly always empty.¹³⁷

Mbandja military resistance was undermined by the falling supply of ammunition. Though the Kwanyama king had forbidden his headmen to fight alongside the Mbandja, and the two *omalenga* Makili and Kalola had done so in defiance of this order,¹³⁸ he had supplied much ammunition to his neighbours in exchange for cattle. Soon after Mufilo this supply stopped

¹³⁰ Ibid., p 80.

¹³¹ Ibid., pp 93 and 129.

¹³² Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 136.

¹³³ Castro, *Campanha*, pp 95-100.

¹³⁴ Ibid., pp 116-22.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp 128-9.

¹³⁶ Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 195.

¹³⁷ Castro, *Campanha*, p 139.

¹³⁸ Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 24.

completely; Nande fully realised he would have greater need of ammunition himself.¹³⁹

The Portuguese progress eleven kilometres south to Maghogo and the royal *embala* was fairly rapid. The retreat of fighters from the engagement at Inyoka¹⁴⁰ had panicked the force at the *embala*, where the palisaded residence was set aflame. The Portuguese alleged this was accidental, as ammunition also went up in smoke, but Castro conceded it was their 'last proof of rebellious insubmission'.¹⁴¹ This ominously 'Russian' tactic¹⁴² foreshadowed the conduct of the Kwanyama in 1915. The *embala* was occupied on 22 September with no further shot fired.¹⁴³ The remaining resistance centred around a small loyalist party close to the king, Sheetekela, who had escaped shortly before the Portuguese entered the smoking remains of his *embala*.¹⁴⁴ With their rifles and remaining ammunition and horses, these rebels maintained a mobile and tenacious existence on the fringes of Ombandja and neighbouring polities.¹⁴⁵ Anxious for a total victory, the Portuguese sought the death or capture of both Sheetekela and Shahuula of Greater Ombandja.¹⁴⁶

The next Portuguese goal was to occupy the *embala* in Greater Ombandja. This was done speedily, despite a lively engagement in the *oshana* before Naluheke.¹⁴⁷ The column entered the still standing royal residence on 4 October,¹⁴⁸ shortly after King Shahuula galloped off with a party of horsemen.¹⁴⁹ Minor skirmishes followed and the route between Greater and Lesser Ombandja was razed thoroughly by auxiliaries who seized cattle as

¹³⁹ Péliissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 446.

¹⁴⁰ Castro, *Campanha*, p 160.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p 162.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p 177.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p 176.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p 201. For Sheetekela's ensuing precarious outlawed existence on the fringes of Ovamboland, see CNDIH cx 5044/31.8.2, Pinto - Governador, 1.11.1908.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 160-1, 169 and 202.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p 13.

¹⁴⁷ Castro, *Campanha*, pp 209-12.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p 213.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 212-3.

payment for their services.¹⁵⁰ Those Mbandja notables who had previously shown some favour to Kalipalula were summoned. They gradually appeared, bringing the cattle demanded as 'war indemnity.'¹⁵¹

Roçadas now began what was euphemistically called his 'liberal indigenous politics'¹⁵² but was in reality a crude piece of political engineering that initially backfired. In the great *embala* still standing at Naluheke he attempted to create a pro-Kalipalula party.¹⁵³ Kalipalula agreed to become king on the undertaking not to embarrass the Portuguese with further raids across the Kunene and to allow traders access to Ombandja.¹⁵⁴ Kalipalula tried to persuade Mbandja hiding in the forest to come forward and swear loyalty. A few trickled out for his investiture.¹⁵⁵ Moments before his official instatement, however, Kalipalula seized a rifle and shot himself.¹⁵⁶ The shot was not fatal, although his jaw was nearly blown off. His brother disarmed him before he could try again. The Portuguese initially thought it was an assassination attempt.¹⁵⁷ It was finally agreed that the assembled notables, few as they were, would propose a new king to the Portuguese next day. On 10 October 1907 Kambungo Popiene was invested as king of Greater Ombandja,¹⁵⁸ for which privilege he was ordered to pay Roçadas 300 cattle and hand over the cannon lost in the *débâcle* of 1904.¹⁵⁹

The occupation of Naluheke marked the southernmost limit of Portuguese penetration, at a distance of 70 kilometres beyond Fort Roçadas.¹⁶⁰ The intention had been to occupy Evale, but due to losses from combat and

¹⁵⁰ Lima, *Cuamatos*, pp 214 and 222; Castro, *Campanha*, pp 190, 198 and 201.

¹⁵¹ Castro, *Campanha*, pp 232 and 242.

¹⁵² Péliissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 467.

¹⁵³ Castro, *Campanha*, p 216.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p 232.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 188 and 232-3.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p 235; Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 211.

¹⁵⁷ Castro, *Campanha*, p 235; Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 212.

¹⁵⁸ Castro, *Campanha*, p 240.

¹⁵⁹ Lima, *Cuamatos*, p 214.

¹⁶⁰ AGCSSp 476-B-IV, Lecomte - Faugère, 17.10.1907; Castro, *Campanha*, p 223.

sickness and shortage of supplies, this was postponed.¹⁶¹ On the return journey to the Kunene a Spiritan missionary conducted a memorial service near Vau de Pembe; 80 bags of recovered bones were buried in a communal grave.¹⁶² The column's withdrawal was orderly, arriving back in Fort Roçadas after two months' absence. On reaching Lisbon they were welcomed as national heroes.¹⁶³

The Luso-Mbandja war of 1907 caused shifts in Ovambo policies towards the Portuguese. One faction in Evale sent an emissary to Roçadas, protesting loyalty and the desire for peace, though the Portuguese had no way of knowing whether this represented the real political climate in Evale.¹⁶⁴ More important was Nande's message disassociating himself from those Kwanyama *omalenga* who had joined the Mbandja forces at Mufilo.¹⁶⁵ Nande had even greater reason now to avoid provocation. But at the same time, Portuguese colonial advances hemmed in Oukwanyama and intensified its internal social problems.

Migrant labour, 1880 - 1914

Increased social stratification was a hallmark of societies heavily penetrated by merchant capital.¹⁶⁶ The centrifugal pulls by *omalenga* in Oukwanyama were one extreme manifestation. At the other extreme, the most striking response was migrant labour. After 1904 Wulffhorst described it

¹⁶¹ AGCSSp 476-B-IV, Lecomte - TRP, 24.11.1907; Castro, *Campanha*, p 276.

¹⁶² Castro, *Campanha*, p 262.

¹⁶³ AHU Repartição Militar 974, Gerais de Angola 6/301 (1907), Ultramar - Ministerio do Reino, 10.12.1907; Governador Mossamedes - Governador Geral, 22.8.1907.

¹⁶⁴ Castro, *Campanha*, pp 273-4.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p 270; see also AGCSSp 476-B-IV, Lecomte - TRP, 15.9.1907.

¹⁶⁶ Miller, *Way of Death*, p 71.

as a modern phenomenon cutting across all the Ovambo communities, drawing thousands into Hereroland every year.¹⁶⁷

Migrant labour is one of the few developed areas of debate in Namibian historiography, contributing to wider questions on migrant labour in southern Africa generally. The starting point for the approach adopted here lies in Marks' and Rathbone's argument which points to

the inadequacy of seeking the origins of migrant labour in the light of the function it and the reserves have come to play in reproducing a cheap labour force... Causes are not necessarily found in consequences.¹⁶⁸

As Kimble shows, structural conditions prevailing in both settler formations and African social formations must be examined in order to understand the movement of labour.¹⁶⁹ Migrant labour from southern Angola and northern Namibia antedated colonial control by twenty-five years. A clear distinction must therefore be drawn between conditions which initially stimulated migrant labour and later colonial interventions which maintained and augmented this flow. In Ovamboland the indigenous origins of labour migration were especially important because there was initially no external conquest, taxation¹⁷⁰ or land dispossession to encourage wage-seekers to migrate.

Clarence-Smith and Moorsom¹⁷¹ attributed the pre-colonial origins of Ovambo labour migration to the aggravation of the processes of surplus appropriation by merchant capital. Involvement in long distance trade led to

¹⁶⁷ AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulfhorst, Was können wir tun für die zum Hereroland ziehenden Ovambojünglinge und Männer?, 1905; AVEM c/k 7 No 17, Wulfhorst, Die Sachsengängerei der Ovambo nach dem Hereroland, 1912.

¹⁶⁸ Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa. African class formation, culture, and consciousness, 1870-1930* (London, 1982), p 19.

¹⁶⁹ Judy Kimble, 'Labour migration in Basutoland, c.1870-1885', in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation*, p 119.

¹⁷⁰ Taxation was only introduced in 1929.

¹⁷¹ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', *passim*; Moorsom, 'Formation', *passim*.

debt, which caused kings and *omalenga* to exploit internal cattle resources. Their extractions fell on the most vulnerable members of society. One escape route from this 'complex process of pauperization' was migrant labour.¹⁷²

This approach has its critics. Gordon argues that *variations* in migration rates cannot be explained by 'such catch-all and mechanistic explanations' as pauperization.¹⁷³ But variations are not the basic point. Clarence-Smith and Moorsom touch on one of the enduring sub-themes of labour migration prior to colonial occupation, which carried over into the period of direct colonial rule. This thesis will try to broaden its context to embrace wider processes resulting from mercantilism and commodity exchange. For whereas central Angolan states had experienced centuries of mercantilism and, over a long period, could deflect its effects towards weaker zones, Ovambo polities experienced it late and at a time of increasing encirclement by colonialism. They were less able to project the impact externally and experienced more of an implosion. This was the background to labour migration.

The basis of Emmett's critique of Clarence-Smith and Moorsom is their alleged view of ecological causation as only 'contextual'.¹⁷⁴ Emmett in turn slightly overstates his case: he neglects internal dynamics and treats Ovambo sub-regional ecology and migration with too little specificity. Emmett bases his arguments on the work of Dias,¹⁷⁵ but deploys no primary sources to substantiate his broad claim that the Ovambo floodplain experienced the same climatic trends as southern Angola.¹⁷⁶ Even when Ovambo migrated

¹⁷² Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 182.

¹⁷³ Robert Gordon, 'Variations', p 261.

¹⁷⁴ A.B. Emmett, 'The Rise of African Nationalism in South West Africa/Namibia, 1915-1966,' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987), p 307, endnote 7. In Moorsom's defence, see his statistical analysis of climatic and harvest data, 1868-1937, in 'Formation', pp 64-72 *passim*.

¹⁷⁵ Jill R. Dias, 'Famine and disease in the history of Angola c.1830-1930,' *JAH* 22 (1981), pp 349-378.

¹⁷⁶ No evidence, in short, is provided to counter several nineteenth century sources which highlight the density of the Ovambo floodplain's demography and the ecology which could supposedly support a high concentration of settlement. See Galton, *Narrative*, p 125.

before 1880, they generally moved from one floodplain polity to another, except in years of exceptional drought which affected the entire eco-region. Only rarely did they leave the floodplain. Nor does migration automatically translate into wage-labour migration. Migrant labour was a new form of migration, which had more in common with raiding¹⁷⁷ or trading¹⁷⁸ parties than transhumance arising from a complex of environmental causes. Labour migration became part of famine behaviour in Ovamboland, but only after the structures of migration were established, and then it was only one of many 'coping strategies'.¹⁷⁹

Climatic fluctuations and ecological crises certainly occurred.¹⁸⁰ Ecology was one factor which triggered labour migration. But the causes of labour migration cannot be reduced to an environmental squeeze. The crucial issue was its interaction with local mechanisms of control over labour, in conjunction with external factors. Nor was labour migration completely determined by the nature of internal controls: migrants exercised some autonomy over whether they would fall in with new methods of labour deployment by elders and political rulers, or whether they would evade mechanisms of control. Therefore the paramountcy of areas of causation, whether ecological or social, is not the real issue: it is their interaction. The most useful question to ask here is, *what* caused *whom* to migrate towards labour centres? In addition, periodisation is vital: what caused whom to migrate *when*? Ecological factors become particularly helpful in answering the question of *timing* in upsurges of labour migration.

The first phase of labour migration lasted from the 1880s, when the first movements took place,¹⁸¹ to roughly 1908, before the numbers of

¹⁷⁷ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 85.

¹⁷⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, pp 229-30.

¹⁷⁹ Michael Watts, 'Entitlements or Empowerment? Famine and Starvation in Africa', *Review of African Political Economy*, 51, 1991, p 18. See Chapters 5 and 7.

¹⁸⁰ See for example W.G. Clarence-Smith, 'Drought in Southern Angola'.

¹⁸¹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 79; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 230.

migrants under German rule started to peak.¹⁸² Small numbers of Ovambo worked in the trading networks in SWA and southern Angola during the 1880s and 1890s¹⁸³ and on the smaller mines and guano workings in the *Schutzgebiet* after 1892.¹⁸⁴ Hundreds were recruited for the Swakopmund harbour works between late 1898 and early 1903,¹⁸⁵ then on the railways to Windhoek (September 1897 - June 1902) and Otavi (October 1903 - December 1906).¹⁸⁶ Up to 1907, however, there were probably never more than about 1,700 Ovambo migrant workers in the Police Zone at any one time.¹⁸⁷ These figures are for GSWA; no precise statistics exist for Angola, but recruitment for the Mossamedes and Benguela railways from 1904, mostly from conquered areas subject after 1907 to hut tax, probably never exceeded an annual 2,000.¹⁸⁸

The first clue as to *who* became labour migrants is Wulfhorst's statement in 1904 that among the Kwanyama, migrants were the 'sons of poor people'.¹⁸⁹ At this period, and probably before, there existed a stratum of young men whose labour was theoretically at the disposal of kings and headmen. The abolition of male circumcision in the initial phase of Kwanyama independence from Onkhumbi¹⁹⁰ may have implied increased royal power over labour at the expense of household and clan heads. Though the missionary did not take this into account, it was against this backdrop that

¹⁸² Though at the beginning of 1908 not all Kwanyama migrants succeeded in finding work in the *Schutzgebiet*. AVEM c/k 7 No 4, Wulfhorst, Referat Omatemba, 1908; RMG *Berichte* 1909, p 92.

¹⁸³ AVEM c/k 7 No 4, Wulfhorst, Referat Omatemba, 1908; RMG *Berichte* 1909, p 92.

¹⁸⁴ Robert Gordon, 'A Note on the History of Labour Action', p 8; Moorsom, 'Formation', p 79; Gervase Clarence-Smith, 'Mossamedes and its hinterland', pp 283-4.

¹⁸⁵ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 230.

¹⁸⁶ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 79.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*; Nitsche, *Ovamboland*, p 133.

¹⁸⁸ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 105. Dorbritz noted in 1904 that fairly large numbers of Ovambo worked on plantations in Angola in return for blankets and guns, but unfortunately gave no exact figures; NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904, p 13.

¹⁸⁹ AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulfhorst, Was können wir tun, 1905.

¹⁹⁰ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 61.

Wulfhorst argued that kings had used young men's labour for their fighting and raiding bands. Wulfhorst believed that when external raiding declined, cadets who earlier might have been 'sent for war' became migrant labourers instead.¹⁹¹

Yet why should young men become migrant labourers? Here the question of impoverishment takes on importance. The eastern kings' involvement in long-distance trade entailed increased internal cattle exactions. The shrinking of lineage herds had been exacerbated by the rinderpest epidemic of 1897. If it was true that labour earnings went towards purchase of cattle, then this migration was part of a longer-term reconstruction of lineage social relations, in constant tension with the centralising kingships. It was ground constantly fought over, for both lineages and the tributary states sought shares of the labour migrant's earnings.

Clarence-Smith and Moorsom argue that young men faced several options to overcome their lack of cattle to set up homesteads. They could migrate to live elsewhere, attach themselves to the king or an *elenga* and hope to acquire cattle under this patronage through raiding, become Christians or migrate as labourers.¹⁹² Gordon points out however that labour migration was seen as a last resort, owing to both the difficulty of the journey and the harsh working conditions in the southern labour centres.¹⁹³ Wulfhorst wrote that the journey was never undertaken 'without trepidation'; the small numbers for the early period of labour migration bear this out.¹⁹⁴

In this early period wages were used most visibly to buy clothes. These were not only exchange items¹⁹⁵ but signified status.¹⁹⁶ Kings and *omalenga* no

¹⁹¹ AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulfhorst, Was können wir tun, 1905.

¹⁹² Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 105.

¹⁹³ Gordon, 'Variations', p 262.

¹⁹⁴ AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulfhorst, Was können wir tun, 1905.

¹⁹⁵ As exchange items clothing or cloth was used to pay for labour of neighbours in the absence of the head of the homestead; interview with Julia Mbida, Odibo, Oukwanyama 21.4.1989. Clothing was also used by southern employers as payment in kind to 'raw' and inexperienced migrants, instead of cash wages; interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, Ombalantu, 3.11.1989.

longer had exclusive access to trade goods such as clothing. Keiling described young Kwanyama men in 1915:

they all came really well-dressed: some wearing suits, others a good shirt; many wore felt hats, with big ostrich feathers which at that time was the latest fashion.

Here one could discern the influence of the Germans: all these people go to work in the copper mines at Otavi, where they pass a whole year, then return with provisions, money and European clothing, and able to express themselves, with some awkwardness, in German.¹⁹⁷

The purchase of cattle, however, was the main long-term aim of labour migrancy. While wages were used later in the colonial era to pay for stock,¹⁹⁸ pre-colonial migrant labourers probably purchased materials in the south and exchanged them for cattle. It is not clear whether a single journey enabled a migrant to set up his homestead. Probably any cattle would contribute towards his matriclan's herd, from which would eventually come the cattle necessary for his marriage, homestead and land usufruct costs.¹⁹⁹ Nor is it clear how much recurrent labour migration occurred at this date.²⁰⁰

Several writers have confidently stated that kings transferred their interests in raiding and trade into labour migration, creaming off tribute from returning migrants.²⁰¹ But this may not have been highly systematic. Certainly the early degree of extraction, described by Möller in the following terms in Uukwambi -

¹⁹⁶ Oral accounts lay considerable emphasis on the migrants' acquisition of clothing. Interview with Konis Imene and Aune Shaningwa, Onampadhi, Ondonga, 4.11.1989; interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Okadiina, Ondonga, 5.11.1989; interview with Simeon Heita, Onawa, Ombalantu, 19.2.1990; interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, Ombalantu, 3.11.1989; interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, Oukwanyama, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 113). See also Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 236.

¹⁹⁷ Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 168.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with Julia Mbida, Odibo, Oukwanyama, 21.4.1989.

¹⁹⁹ Fritz Wege, 'Die Anfänge', p 207; *Luderitzbuchter Zeitung*, Nr 45, 5.11.1910.

²⁰⁰ Wulfhorst stated that young Kwanyama men took up second contracts with reluctance. AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulfhorst, Was können wir tun, 1905.

²⁰¹ Moorsom, 'Formation', pp 82 and 84; Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 233; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, p 107.

Nezumbo... wants absolute obedience from everybody; before they marry the young men must work with the white people on the other side of the Kunene and from there bring back a cow as payment²⁰²

- could not be sustained after the large increase in migrant labour from 1908, especially in the larger polities. Only in the context of colonial rule did Ipumbu ya Tshilongo, for example, become notorious for extracting earnings from returning Kwambi migrants. In most cases, social and ideological pressure rather than compulsion provided Ovambo kings with their 'voluntary' gifts, called *pandulo* in Ondonga.²⁰³ Informal prestations were the pattern.

Evidence indicates that a distinct subculture developed, especially among Christianised migrants. In Oukwanyama young men who had visited the south paraded their foreign clothing after church service and impressed others with their accounts of life in the south.²⁰⁴ Their pidgin German helped to define this subculture.²⁰⁵ Ex-migrants met regularly;²⁰⁶ there is no reason to suppose this subculture was confined to Christian Kwanyama. This in turn helped to normalise migrancy, facilitating return journeys to the south and attracting new migrants.

The bad times are overlooked. Sometimes they are left without the desire to go back, but with time they forget the bad things, the desire renews and they set off again... There is no question that Ovamboland is increasingly retreating from its isolation.²⁰⁷

²⁰² Möller, *Journey through Angola*, p 117.

²⁰³ Interview with Elifas Shindondola, Oniipa, Ondonga, 20.11.1989. This informant was the husband of the late Queen Mother of Ondonga. An alternative oral source suggests *pandulo* was stricter in Ondonga than in Oukwanyama; interview with Petrus Ndongo, Odibo, Oukwanyama, 23.11.1989.

²⁰⁴ AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulforst, Was können wir tun, 1905.

²⁰⁵ Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 168.

²⁰⁶ AVEM c/k 7 No 2, Wulforst, Was können wir tun, 1905.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

Emmett rightly points to the correlations between the number of migrant labourers and drought, famine and other natural disasters between 1907 and 1916.²⁰⁸ During this second phase (1908-15) labour migration reached a peak not achieved again until the 1930s. By 1910 the annual total of migrants reaching the south had risen to over 9,000, assessed by Moorsom on an average migrancy cycle of eight to nine months each as a labour-force of over 6,000. This was maintained until 1914.²⁰⁹

Though the structural mechanisms for migration to southern labour markets were in place by 1908,²¹⁰ up to this date the labour flow had never exceeded 2,000. Drought and locust infestation helped to raise the number in 1908 to 4,000.²¹¹ The further and more severe drought of 1910-11 coincided with an increased migration rate which exceeded 9,000 in each year. The good rainfall of 1911-12 was accompanied by a drop in recruitment to just over 6,000 in 1912.²¹² The years between 1913 and 1916 saw almost continuous drought and famine; the migrant labour force increased to over 11,000 in 1913-14.²¹³

But as evidence from the colonial period later showed,²¹⁴ the correlations between drought, famine and labour migration were more complex than these figures imply. The increasing tendency towards migration obviously had to interlock with a labour market - however little influence the latter had in stimulating migration. Labour markets became accessible to the Ovambo due to the proximity of developing capitalist economies. In 1904 the Germans did not renew the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association's right to recruit in GSWA, because labour needs in the *Schutzgebiet* had been

²⁰⁸ Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism', p 307.

²⁰⁹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 79.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p 87.

²¹¹ Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism', p 307.

²¹² *Ibid.*; see also AVEM c/k 7 No 17, Wulfhorst, *Die Sachsengängerei*, 1912.

²¹³ Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism', p 307.

²¹⁴ See Chapter 6.

transformed.²¹⁵ The Herero and Nama rebellions took the Germans three years to crush.²¹⁶ Much local labour was needed to service the German military effort. Railway construction added to labour demand; by the end of the Uprisings in 1907, the pre-war distance of 382 kilometres had increased to 1,288 kilometres.²¹⁷

Workers initially could not be raised within GSWA.²¹⁸ Ovambo migrants were few relative to the demand. The government could neither afford nor risk using force to persuade them.²¹⁹ The Herero had been the subject of genocidal reprisals, Nama labour was predominantly indentured to farms, if not exiled.²²⁰ The German administration was therefore obliged to recruit in the Cape.²²¹ But towards 1910 labour again became very scarce. Economic expansion had been further stimulated by the establishment of diamond diggings near Luderitz in 1908²²² and the re-opening in 1906 of the Tsumeb copper mine which reached full production by 1910.²²³ Gordon quotes an estimated 85 per cent of the total indigenous male population of the *Schutzgebiet* in wage labour.²²⁴ The obvious palliative after the 1904-07 rebellions was to mobilise the Ovambo;²²⁵ as Dorbritz commented, Ovamboland's 'human material' was of 'capital value'.²²⁶

In 1905 officials visited Ovambo kings to negotiate labour agreements. Ordinances passed between 1906-08 'protected' Ovambo workers and prohibited the entry of whites into Ovamboland. The importation of firearms,

²¹⁵ Beinart, 'Jamani', p 169.

²¹⁶ See Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, passim.

²¹⁷ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 231; Moorsom, 'Formation', pp 62-3; Gordon, 'Variations', p 263. The latter does not specify a date for his contrasting figure.

²¹⁸ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Bruggemann - Kaiserliche Landespolizei, ca 1903-11.

²¹⁹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 80.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p 62; Moorsom, 'Birth', p 20; Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, p 232.

²²¹ Beinart, 'Jamani', p 169.

²²² Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting*, p 244; Gordon, 'Variations', p 263.

²²³ Gordon, 'Variations', p 263; Moorsom, 'Formation', p 61.

²²⁴ Gordon, 'Variations', p 263.

²²⁵ Official recruitment of Cape labour was halted in 1912; see Beinart, 'Jamani', pp 182-3.

²²⁶ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904; see also ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Wulfhorst - RMG, 6.1.1905.

horses and alcohol was forbidden, though some illegal trade continued from the south.²²⁷ The sale of *aguardente* was at least reduced.²²⁸ Labour recruiters were posted at two border stations at Namutoni and Okaukweyo through which all Ovambo migrants had to pass. Officially sanctioned labour recruiters visited kings periodically to arrange the supply of recruits.²²⁹ Yet even when the Ovambo supplied over 10,000 labourers annually between 1910 and 1914, the number was insufficient.²³⁰

Numbers were not the only problem. Wege shows that absconding and absenteeism led to such a degree of fluctuation in the workforce and low productivity, that employers made urgent representations to the administration.²³¹ The conditions of work, housing and rations endured by Ovambo migrant workers,²³² as well as disease²³³ and continuing commitment to the pastoral and agricultural cycles in Ovamboland, encouraged high labour fluctuation. For Ovambo leaders too, control over the movement of migrating groups became more complicated as numbers grew. Schlettwein described methods in 1907:

The chief chooses the men and sends them out under a foreman to acquire clothes and other useful articles. The final date by which such a party has to be back is precisely stipulated, and woe betide anyone who doesn't return at the correct time.²³⁴

²²⁷ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 4, Ambolandverordnung 1906; Eirola, 'Reservation', p 36.

²²⁸ Siiskonen, *Trade*, p 187.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ The boundary placed many Ovambo inside Portuguese territory, where Germany was forbidden to recruit labour. Negotiations to end this prohibition were interrupted by World War I. Wege, 'Anfänge', p 209.

²³¹ Wege, 'Anfänge', pp 200-3.

²³² Wege, 'Zur Sozialen Lage', pp 208-18.

²³³ AVEM c/k 7 No 17, Wulfhorst, *Die Sachsengängerei*, 1912.

²³⁴ C. Sclettwein, *Der Farmer in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika* (Wisner, 1907), p 255, quoted in and translated by Moorsom, 'Formation', p 84.

Once outside Ovamboland, however, migrants exercised some independence. When a German official rebuked Kambonde in 1908 for his subjects' absenteeism, he countered that he was powerless to prevent them.²³⁵

The short, six-month labour contracts supposedly attracted workers, allowing them to leave after harvest and return before planting,²³⁶ though it is likely that labour-repressive policies by employers attempted to prevent this. German employers in the south disliked the short contracts. The Luderitz Chamber of Mines tried unsuccessfully to lengthen the period of contract. The Otavi Minen und Eisenbahngesellschaft (OMEG) attempted to settle a few Ovambo in the Otavi area, again unsuccessfully.²³⁷

Ovambo kings were pressed to co-operate in labour recruitment; the latter had become central to the political interaction of the German state and Ovambo polities. Nande²³⁸ and Kambonde²³⁹ agreed to co-operate when Franke visited in 1908.²⁴⁰ This visit coincided with serious famine²⁴¹ and the Germans sent eighty tons of grain to create goodwill and dependency.²⁴² In early 1909, famine relief maize was also sent by the Portuguese in Humbe.²⁴³ Both colonial powers had political objectives in bringing famine relief: Germany offered 'protection' against Portuguese attack, which Nande accepted.²⁴⁴ The Portuguese demanded that Nande renew his pledge of loyalty to the new king, Manuel, and requested his help in attacking Evale.²⁴⁵ When the latter was occupied in 1909, the Kwanyama did not assist the

²³⁵ NAN ZBU WII k2 B3, Streitwolf - Gouverneur, 30.9.1912.

²³⁶ Wege, 'Anfänge', p 202; Moorsom, 'Formation', p 85.

²³⁷ Wege, 'Anfänge', p 203.

²³⁸ RMG *Berichte* 1908, pp 172 and 216.

²³⁹ NAN ZBU WII k2 B3, Franke, Bericht, 14.10.1908.

²⁴⁰ See also NAN ZBU WII k3, Treaties 1908.

²⁴¹ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 76; AGCSSp 476-B-IV, Blanc - TRP, 10.3.1909.

²⁴² Moorsom, 'Formation', p 83; AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 76; AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Der Kriegszug der Portugiesen gegen Mandume, ca 1910-33; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 4.

²⁴³ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 77; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 472.

²⁴⁴ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 77.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

Portuguese, but they did not assist the Vale either.²⁴⁶ Nande navigated these political waters with some skill; he did not challenge colonial demands but neither did he concede much in real terms.

The 1908 famine was yet another factor which sharpened social differentiation, mainly through loss of cattle which caused longer-term impoverishment. Traders from Angola arrived with grain to barter for cattle;²⁴⁷ their preference for heifers and milk cows aggravated the difficulties of rebuilding herds in the post-famine period.²⁴⁸ These factors contributed to the growth of migrant labour.

Reversing the trend: internal struggles under Mandume ya Ndemufayo

'A peaceable man would be best for us,' wrote Wulforth regarding the Kwanyama succession, during Nande's illness in 1910.²⁴⁹ But missionary hopes were disappointed. When the Kwanyama king died on 5 February 1911,²⁵⁰ his successor was Mandume ya Ndemufayo, who in his late teens had already acquired a controversial reputation.

Wulforth reckoned Mandume had been born around 1894.²⁵¹ His mother was Ndapona, a daughter of Hipondolua, who was the grandmother of Weyulu and Nande.²⁵² Weyulu's two younger brothers, Nande and Hamalua, were expected to succeed him at the time of Mandume's birth.²⁵³ Despite this distance in the line of matrilineal succession for the kingship, at

²⁴⁶ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 473.

²⁴⁷ AVEM c/i 20, Wulforth, *Rückblick*, 1917, p 77.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ RMG *Berichte* 1911, p 119.

²⁵¹ This date is more probable than 1890, given by Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 225. 1896 appears in AVEM c/k 22 No 12, Wulforth, 'Kaukungwa', ca 1910-33; but 1893-4 appears in AVEM c/i 20, Wulforth, *Rückblick*, 1917.

²⁵² AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches*, ca 1901-13; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 33.

²⁵³ AVEM c/k 22 No 1, Wulforth, 'Erastus Omalodu', ca. 1910-1933.

his birth and throughout his childhood his life was endangered.²⁵⁴ His redoubtable great-aunt Nekoto was responsible for protecting him.²⁵⁵ Sckär believed that the scars on Mandume's face²⁵⁶ came from severe burns when, as a boy, Nekoto concealed him in an antbear hole and lit a fire over it.²⁵⁷ Later he was secretly removed to his grandmother Hipondolua's homestead, remaining under Nekoto's care. If Sckär's testimony is truthful, it accounts for the first impression Mandume made on Wulforth as a young boy: 'small and misshapen, unpleasant and unfriendly in demeanour.'²⁵⁸ Mandume was moved to Oshiteve until he was about ten, then was kept in border areas of Oukwanyama, always in fear of assassination.²⁵⁹ Finally, at a moment Nekoto judged safe, he was allowed to live openly at her homestead.

Mandume seems to have grown up with a number of grudges, 'in jealousy' wrote Wulforth, 'channelling his energy into his own egotism.'²⁶⁰ His later career showed a multi-faceted character, but he knew how to inspire fear from an early age.²⁶¹ He trained himself to be an excellent marksman, as South African troops later acknowledged.²⁶² The Rhenish mission could not confirm the rumour that he shot his foster-father, but commented that they could well believe it.²⁶³ Record does exist of the boy Mandume shooting an elderly Kwanyama man who remonstrated with youths for stealing his

²⁵⁴ Mandume was Namhadi's nephew. Namhadi had killed the sister of Weyulu and Nande to end their line of succession, which was one source of hatred between the two fractions. AVEM c/k 22 No 1, Wulforth, 'Erastus Omalodu', ca. 1910-1933; c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917; No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, ca 1901-13.

²⁵⁵ AVEM c/k 22 No 12, Wulforth, 'Kaukungwa', ca 1910-1933; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 33.

²⁵⁶ Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 171.

²⁵⁷ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, ca 1901-13; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 33.

²⁵⁸ AVEM c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917, p 89.

²⁵⁹ AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, Historisches, 1901-13; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 80; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 33.

²⁶⁰ AVEM, c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917, pp 126-7.

²⁶¹ RMG *Berichte* 1913, p 65.

²⁶² NAN RCO 10/1916/1, UG Representative Namakunde, Notes re Mandume, 29.4.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland and Hahn, Re Ovamboland and Chief Mandume, n.d. (ca 1915-16).

²⁶³ AVEM c/k 22 No 12, Wulforth, 'Kaukungwa', ca 1910-1933; c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, 1917, p 89.

cattle.²⁶⁴ This was the arrogance of notorious Kwanyama princelings before him, such as Ombishi, Kanime and Nandjungu.²⁶⁵

Such was his reputation when the succession question arose. Several notables considered the wisdom of fleeing Oukwanyama if Mandume succeeded Nande in 1910.²⁶⁶ Nande had been hostile to him, but 'lacked the energy' to deal with him.²⁶⁷ Since Hamalua predeceased Nande in 1910,²⁶⁸ there was no close rival to Mandume's claim and the succession was relatively smooth by Kwanyama standards. Rhenish missionaries claimed that this was due to the spread of their influence,²⁶⁹ but it was probably Mandume's first command as king to uphold peace²⁷⁰ that held the calm during the interregnum.

Mandume quickly showed an astute political style. The only violence after Nande's death was the execution of one elderly man accused of causing it by witchcraft.²⁷¹ Previous royal funerals had usually involved more casualties, especially the late king's widows. Typically, again, Mandume personally shot the accused.²⁷² He moved the capital to Ondjiva and ordered the construction of a new *embala*,²⁷³ as was customary for a new king.

In Mandume's initial approach to Kwanyama external policy, he made friendly overtures to the Rhenish mission, though they surmised that he intended consolidating his position before making known any 'true persuasion.'²⁷⁴ But he showed no compunction towards Portuguese traders

²⁶⁴ RMG *Berichte* 1913, p 65.

²⁶⁵ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917.

²⁶⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 12, Wulfhorst, 'Kaukungwa', ca 1910-1933; c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 89.

²⁶⁷ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 89.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p 78; RMG *Berichte* 1910, p 60.

²⁶⁹ RMG *Berichte* 1911, pp 119 and 140-1.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p 120.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p 130.

²⁷² Welsch suspected the victim was a political undesirable. RMG *Berichte* 1911, pp 140-1.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p 140.

²⁷⁴ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 89.

present in the country,²⁷⁵ and expelled them after denouncing their inflated prices.²⁷⁶ It soon became clear that he intended to balance an anti-Portuguese stance with pro-German leanings. A few days after Nande's death, during the national wake where thousands of Kwanyama were assembled, Mandume informed Welsch that he held the same political attitude towards Germany as had Nande. He requested Welsch to convey this message to the German government.²⁷⁷ Mandume then turned to domestic matters, where the new *régime* showed its greatest originality.

One reason why Mandume is so compelling a historical figure is because his character, reforms and resistance are recorded in an unprecedented variety of sources. His ideas and personality were powerful and complex, giving rise to contradictions in written and oral accounts of both his life and death. Some of this ambivalence is reflected in missionary sources, while colonial sources for the last two years of his life run the gamut of caution, sympathy, frustration, hostility and admiration.²⁷⁸ A vital 'insider' source, giving unique insights into Mandume's internal politics, is a piece of Kwanyama 'self-history' referred to here as the Kaulinge tradition, though it is a tradition still in the process of construction.²⁷⁹ Elsewhere in this thesis oral evidence has been used selectively and spliced in with written evidence. But Kaulinge's evidence has a coherence which merits treatment as a 'text' in itself. This is not because, being Kwanyama oral testimony, it is somehow 'truer' than written documents by outsiders. It does offer alternative insights which no other source can even suggest, but it has flaws and inconsistencies. The faultlines are themselves most revealing, because if examined closely they

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 289.

²⁷⁷ RMG *Berichte* 1911, p 120.

²⁷⁸ See for example Negley Farson, *Behind God's Back*, 19th impression (London, 1947), p 78.

²⁷⁹ A fuller and contextualised appraisal of this 'tradition' is provided in Volume 2, Appendix 7, pp 1-25, as part of the introduction to transcriptions of this and other oral evidence.

show a set of interests at play different from those expressed in European accounts of Mandume's rule. This permits a view of Mandume not just as an individual agent, which is how much literature depicts him, but as a king who cannot be separated from a royal lineage and ideology which asserted itself in the construction of a tradition. The context was the prelude to conquest, after several decades of social disruption by mercantile penetration.

New kings usually announced their internal policies shortly after assuming power. Nande and Weyulu had largely confined themselves to undertakings to uphold inherited given Kwanyama laws. Mandume diverged sharply. Wulforth, whose knowledge of Kwanyama history was confined to his experience since 1890, was convinced that Mandume laid down 'new laws';²⁸⁰ but the Kaulinge tradition suggests they were largely a revival of previous rules, specifically those which might return Oukwanyama to the internal conditions which had prevailed under Mweshipandeka.

Mandume is represented in both written and oral accounts as having from the first a coherent, integrated vision of necessary internal change. The reforms themselves came piecemeal, each building on the success of the last. Mandume first tested the waters with a decree on fruit trees.²⁸¹ No unripe fruit was to be picked, especially from *omuandi* trees, whose fruit had been increasingly beaten off prematurely during recent droughts, a practice which Nande had allowed to continue unchecked. The order was given at the first council of headmen after Nande's death. Mandume followed it up by activating an internal intelligence system, revealing a distrust of headmen who had hitherto enjoyed considerable independence.

According to the tradition, the first offender was forced to eat all the unripe fruit he had picked:

²⁸⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulforth, Rückblick, p 89; see also Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 33-4.

²⁸¹ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, Oukwanyama, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 43-5).

That case of the basket with unripe fruit was immediately known by almost everyone in the country. From that day on no-one tried to get unripe fruit from the trees.²⁸²

The efficacy of punishment is related symbolically in Kaulinge's account, doubtless for didactic purposes to promote both the ecological 'good' and the authoritarian objective.

The tradition then relates that Mandume used his second meeting with the council of headmen to tackle the issue of random shooting, prevalent and often fatal in a country given over to firearms. Mandume criticised the unnecessary loss of life caused by the shooting which had come to mark weddings and the annual cattle feasts. He also argued forcefully that the Kwanyama expected war with foreigners who threatened to seize their land. Both guns and ammunition came from them, and if they were misused, new supplies would be doubtful, making the situation critical if war broke out. He ordered an end to all unnecessary shooting.²⁸³

The tradition again stresses Mandume's judgement and punishment of the first offender, who pleaded in mitigation that he had been bewitched. "Compassion in this regard does not work. I want to have sympathy with the whole nation", was Mandume's alleged reply.²⁸⁴ He ordered his attendants to shoot the culprit and told headmen to explain to their people what this execution signified. In the tradition, Kwanyama subjects again readily internalised this lesson. At the funeral of one of Mandume's uncles shortly afterwards, when shooting might have been expected, rifles were silent. To reduce internal casualties further, Mandume also banned war-cries, used to summon supporters to assist in a fray.²⁸⁵ What is interesting is the corroboration in other sources of the 'positive' impact of the reforms. Rhenish

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p 45.

²⁸³ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 45-6). This reform is also recorded in AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 89.

²⁸⁴ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 48).

²⁸⁵ This is not in the Kaulinge tradition as it stands, but is recorded in AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 90.

missionaries praised the new Kwanyama orderliness. 'He brought discipline, cultivation and order to the land, and it soon showed how easy the people were to lead if a firm hand was present.'²⁸⁶

Once these preliminary measures were in place, Mandume began to tackle rival power bases in earnest. His intention was to curb the powers and abuses of senior headmen.²⁸⁷ In its representations of this internal struggle, the Kaulinge tradition appears most heavily influenced by an ideological agenda. The past under Mweshipandeka was subtly idealised. It was most strikingly after Mweshipandeka's reign that *omalenga* had seized opportunities for semi-autonomy and to build up their own followings; the intensification of rivalries between kings and *omalenga* had occurred in the context of merchant capital. In Mweshipandeka's reign mercantilism had barely seeped into the floodplain and the polity had not been threatened by the same degree of decentralisation. Mandume's real aim was to curb the powers of the *omalenga* and re-assert the central authority of the kingship, with legal processes and raiding no longer the initiative of ambitious *omalenga*. Recourse to a historical tradition grounded in Mweshipandeka's era gave legitimacy to these political initiatives, as indeed to Mandume's section of the royal lineage.

Before he had succeeded to the kingship, Mandume was known to be highly critical of the manner in which the Kwanyama kingdom had become impoverished and disorderly through the weakness of its kings and self-aggrandisement by *omalenga*.

And when he viewed how things had been conducted he was not feeling good. He used to tell people that if he became king of the nation, he would not behave like his uncles in many respects.²⁸⁸

²⁸⁶ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, pp 126-7; see also Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 288.

²⁸⁷ See also Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 225; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 80.

²⁸⁸ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 42).

He criticised the way in which his poorer countrymen and women were preyed upon, ultimately an impoverishment of the whole nation. He also deplored the depletion of Oukwanyama's natural resources, because his predecessors neglected to exert royal control over the upkeep of fruit trees in particular.²⁸⁹ From an early age therefore, Mandume is represented as being possessed of a vision of restoring Oukwanyama to a perceived *status quo ante*. The latter was arguably constructed by oral tradition within his lineage group, which, though a retrospective construct, was attractive for its image of lesser proto-class tensions and, not least, the enhanced power of its kings *vis-à-vis omalenga*. According to one oral account, he vowed to remain unmarried until his reforms were effective, which he equated with bringing peace to Oukwanyama.²⁹⁰

The powers of senior headmen to appoint sub-headmen were an irritant to central power, but it was specifically their local judicial powers which Mandume sought to end. The senior headmen could hold hearings and make legal decisions on cases of bewitching or poisoning; Mandume argued that here lay the greatest abuses.²⁹¹ At a meeting of the council of headmen, Mandume accused the *omalenga* of culling the 'naturally rich' people of Oukwanyama. He argued that individuals among them abused their power by victimising wealthy people in order to appropriate their crops and cattle. Oukwanyama depended on these 'naturally rich' to help the nation during famine.²⁹² The country would suffer if such tendencies continued. If the wealthy suffered under witchcraft accusations, then people would be afraid to work hard and accumulate property because it would attract attention and jeopardise their lives. He informed the council that all hearings would

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p 58.

²⁹⁰ Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 174.

²⁹¹ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 48). See also Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 34.

²⁹² Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 49).

henceforth be held in Ondjiva at the king's residence; local courts in headmen's districts were closed. Mandume went even further, to make the order retrospective, so to speak: all injustices perpetrated in the reign of Weyulu were to be exposed. The oral account is graphic on the reaction to this:

The king cleverly and gradually introduced his orders to his headmen. First it was the order of the fruit trees, then the firing or shooting order followed by the one on senior headmen to stop trying people at their homes. At this juncture all the senior headmen were puzzled by the king's remark. They were just sitting, staring at one another and feeling offended. They had no more rights to take people's cattle or crops.²⁹³

To outsiders, the measures against *omalenga* appeared to have effect:

Chief Mandume holds himself well. He is not as weak-kneed as the deceased Nande. Also, the poor man gets his rights with him. The big people, who were previously ruining the country, he holds in discipline. If they don't obey, they get lashes from a rhino-hide whip.²⁹⁴

An important aspect of this area of reform in Kaulinge's account is the gender dimension to Mandume's populist project. Earlier kings and *omalenga* had held the view that women should not be allowed to own cattle. Women had therefore experienced confiscation. Mandume rescinded this 'law'.²⁹⁵ This dimension warrants much deeper exploration than is possible here. It is also interesting to note that Mandume sought to control sexual criminality: stringent punishments against rapists were forcibly applied.²⁹⁶

Further measures towards centralisation followed. Mandume called all the war-leaders, the commanders of the *etanga*, to attend the next headmen's council. He announced that no further raids for cattle and captives were to be

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ RMG *Berichte* 1911, p 215; see also Lehmann, 'Die politische', pp 290-1.

²⁹⁵ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 69).

²⁹⁶ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 46.

made in neighbouring states without his personal sanction. He was not condemning raiding per se, but bringing it back under royal control. He denounced the *omalenga* of the reigns of Namhadi, Weyulu and Nande who had acted independently and attacked countries with which Oukwanyama had good relations. *Omalenga* and commanders were ordered to cease independent raiding. Mandume accused them of attacking neighbouring states and keeping the majority of cattle, forwarding few to the king's herds. They sold most captives and kept the proceeds. Mandume now claimed sole authority to despatch warbands. Commanders and *omalenga* could seek permission to raid, but the final decision was the king's. He especially argued against attacking neighbours well-disposed towards Oukwanyama, notably the ovaMbwela, who had sought peace and Kwanyama assistance in the regional war situation.²⁹⁷

The tradition names the first transgressor of the new law as Hangula ya Mutumbulwa, who instigated an attack on Ekamba. His followers returned, divided the captured herd and took most to the royal *embala*, perhaps a placatory gesture. Mandume ordered the cows to be milked, then forced Hangula to drink the entire container until he was ill.²⁹⁸

In Mandume's tussle with the commanders, the latter had argued that Kwanyama prosperity depended on their raids. Mandume countered that the only way to obtain sufficient food was to work hard in the fields and that the real Kwanyama problem was fear of work. This argument, which comes over powerfully in Kaulinge's account, constituted the core of Mandume's reforms because they were directed most fundamentally at producers, not the *élite*. Centralisation and the curbing of the latter were prerequisites for the healing of society after decades of increasing social division. The healing itself would come with the elimination of hunger.

²⁹⁷ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 50-1).

²⁹⁸ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 51-3).

Mandume therefore urged his subjects to cultivate more land. Reasons for this promotion of cultivation were primarily recent droughts and food scarcity.²⁹⁹ Moreover, famine gave external powers the opportunity to intervene in Kwanyama affairs, as in 1908-9.³⁰⁰ This undermines historiography which implicitly suggests Kwanyama passivity in the face of declining subsistence, with migrant labour their only alternative.³⁰¹ In contrast, Kwanyama discourse portrays a vigorous human agency.³⁰² It was a conscious effort to do so by promoting what amounts to a 'work ethic.' Ideologically, the Kaulinge tradition reconstructs a similar work ethic in Mweshipandeka's reign, which could be drawn upon as 'tradition.'³⁰³

Since Kaulinge himself is a pastor, the possibility exists that he may have put a retrospective construct on to the reigns of Mandume and Mweshipandeka, consonant with received Lutheran work values. But this underrates Kaulinge's historical skills. For in this area of testimony, his portrayal of Mandume's initiatives is confirmed with almost bizarre exactitude by contemporary Rhenish missionaries. When Mandume re-enforced the obligations for women from surrounding districts to work the royal fields, which had been neglected for years,³⁰⁴ the Christian congregation at Ondjiva was obliged to undertake a disproportionately large division of this work. Local missionaries were delighted when Mandume publicly praised the Christians for their industriousness in this task.³⁰⁵ Two different parties of reformers clearly put the same value on agricultural work.

Balanced against other sources, the Kaulinge tradition not only shows resounding consistencies. Inconsistencies and omissions in the interpretation

²⁹⁹ Severe droughts occurred in 1911 and 1913; *RMG Berichte* 1911, p 186; *RMG Berichte* 1913, p 143; interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 64).

³⁰⁰ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 83.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p 81; Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism', p 43.

³⁰² Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 69).

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p 35.

³⁰⁴ *RMG Berichte* 1912, p 160.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 160-1.

of Mandume's role in Kwanyama history also emerge. For instance, the subject of migrant labour in Mandume's reign, and his policy towards it, is not mentioned, although it reached a peak in 1912-14. Because agricultural work was performed overwhelmingly by women, presumably migrant labour did not interfere with intensification of agricultural work, while six-month contracts allowed young men to return at times of peak labour needs in the pastoral cycle.³⁰⁶ Migrant labour which benefited lineages and built up matriclan herds was, arguably, consonant with Mandume's reformist outlook. 'The poor man gets his rights with him'.³⁰⁷

Another omission in the Kaulinge tradition as it is here transcribed is its failure to acknowledge the tension between the new Kwanyama king and German missions. Contrary to Portuguese and Catholic belief,³⁰⁸ Rhenish missionaries had taught Mandume little more than to sign his name and speak elementary German.³⁰⁹ Nor did Mandume favour Christianity; he made mission work and existence extremely difficult at times. In February 1912 Mandume's horses were deliberately driven by youths into the Rhenish community's fields to graze, destroying their crops.³¹⁰ Soon afterwards Mandume shot a Christian's young son for giving the prohibited war cry, though a fellow-offender was spared after his father offered the king a basket of grain in payment.³¹¹ The conviction that Mandume had a grudge against Christians and encouraged or allowed anti-Christian elements to persecute them was also fostered by ensuing witchcraft accusations. A particular case of a Christian named Israel, accused of killing his brother-in-law by witchcraft and found shot dead, led missionaries to suspect that Mandume was indirectly to blame.³¹² Mandume also pressed the mission's Christian wagon-

³⁰⁶ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 85; Wege, 'Anfänge', p 202.

³⁰⁷ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 90.

³⁰⁸ Péliissier, 'Mandume', p 225; Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 171.

³⁰⁹ Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 176.

³¹⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 91; *RMG Berichte* 1912, p 215.

³¹¹ *RMG Berichte* 1912, p 215.

³¹² *Ibid.*; *RMG Berichte* 1913, p 19.

driver to shoot a woman accused of witchcraft, and was very provoked when he refused.³¹³

The Christian community in Oukwanyama had come to feel very insecure. At intervals families fled to Ondonga where Christians were more secure. These flights were usually precipitated by rumours of impending witchcraft accusations.³¹⁴ When taxed with the annoyances facing the Christians, Mandume implied that pressures from the elders at court, who had remonstrated with him over his previous forbearance, had caused his change in attitude.³¹⁵ Persecution of Christians was an ugly side to Mandume's populism;³¹⁶ they provided an object of 'otherness' which helped to mobilise unity among non-Christian Kwanyama. But it may have been an underswell over which Mandume had little control.

On one religious and cultural issue, however, Mandume and the missions locked horns directly in 1914. This concerned Kwanyama pressure on young Christian women to attend the *efundula* ceremony.³¹⁷ Rhenish missionaries refused to countenance participation by converts, not even a compromise that they need take part for only one hour instead of the full three to four weeks.³¹⁸ Confrontation was imminent in 1914, but Mandume postponed the next *efundula* ceremony until 1915, which allowed passions to be shelved temporarily.³¹⁹ The tussle over *efundula* in particular led Rhenish

³¹³ RMG *Berichte* 1912, p 215.

³¹⁴ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 91; AVEM c/k 7 No 21, Wulfhorst, Unsere Ovambomission, 1916; RMG *Berichte* 1912, p 216; RMG *Berichte* 1913, pp 141-2.

³¹⁵ AVEM c/k 7 No 21, Wulfhorst, Unsere Ovambo, 1916; RMG *Berichte* 1912, pp 215-6.

³¹⁶ RMG *Berichte* 1912, p 216. Sckär is very explicit on this point. See also RMG *Berichte* 1914, p 77.

³¹⁷ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, pp 91-3 and 121; AVEM c/k 5, Protokolle, Ukuanjama, 1913; RMG *Berichte* 1914, p 77; Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 290.

³¹⁸ AVEM c/k 7 No 18, Welsch, Die Forderung der Oberhäuptlings Mandume, 1914; RMG *Berichte* 1914, pp 80-1.

³¹⁹ AVEM c/k 5, Welsch, Referat, April 1914.

missionaries to describe their experience of Mandume's rule as one of '*Sturm und Drang*'.³²⁰

The vision and long-headedness of many of Mandume's reforms conveyed in the Kaulinge tradition contrasts with the impressions of his character which emerge from other sources. Mission sources, especially Rhenish, suggest that Mandume was impetuous, restless and highly autocratic, reluctant to accept criticism, whether from headmen, elders or paternalistic German missionaries. 'He was intelligent and thoughtful,' wrote Wulfhorst, 'but very wilful.'³²¹ His use of internal violence especially divided observers.³²² In 1913, for example, he ordered twenty cattle thieves from a neighbouring polity to be shot; previous kings were more likely to have extracted lucrative ransoms from the captives' relatives.³²³ One explanation for his consistent use of force was the need to centralise violence as much as judicial processes and military command.³²⁴

True, Mandume himself killed many people, but comparatively fewer were killed than previously, because the lordship of the headmen was broken. So it came about that many poor people did not find Mandume's oppression so troublesome. He robbed no cattle and everyone could keep their cattle in peace, which was not the case earlier, for other chiefs had always needed oxen for the traders from Angola, which they simply robbed in their own country. Mandume dealt out heavy punishment when someone did something unlawful, otherwise he left people in peace.³²⁵

On balance, Mandume was probably clear of sheer gratuitous violence. He had undoubtedly been harshly brutalised during his short life, but it was only

³²⁰ *Sturm und Drang* - storm and stress. AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 93.

³²¹ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 93; his intelligence also impressed Keiling in 1915. See Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, pp 171-5.

³²² AVEM No 1.477, Sckär, *Historisches*, ca 1901-13; Péliissier, 'Mandume', p 225; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 81; Lehmann, 'Die politische', p 289; Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 34.

³²³ RMG *Berichte* 1913, p 236.

³²⁴ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 58).

³²⁵ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 90.

one facet of his character and did not colour his entire conduct or impair his whole judgement. Allegations of 'psychic instability' are undoubtedly exaggerated.³²⁶ Welsch, the Rhenish missionary closest to him in his last years, conveyed this impression to Union officials in 1916:

Mandume is a man of moods but it would seem that the good predominates and his deflections are a result of a temporary mental derangement [,] as he is by no means a fool as might be supposed from some of his actions.³²⁷

Brutality and the desire to strengthen central power notwithstanding, the foresight of his social policies argues percipience and even some sense of social justice. Some oral accounts describe Mandume as going about dressed unrecognisably in rags, making sure people were obeying his laws.³²⁸ A rich Kwanyama enjoyment of verbal wit and wiliness against powerful subjects also emerges from diverse oral fragments from Mandume's reign. One *elenga* Shikongo, for example, concealed large-scale smuggling of cattle between Ovamboland and Kavango from the king. His fabrications to explain his wealth and avoid parting with any of it did not fool Mandume, who trounced Shikongo in elaborate public verbal exchanges.³²⁹

Mandume was certainly capable of dissimulation in pursuit of a goal, especially if it was necessary to satisfy the conventions of kingly conduct. His notorious uncle, Kanime, banished for life by Mandume's predecessors, came back into Oukwanyama with a few followers in 1912. Because of Kanime's royal blood, Kwanyama law permitted no commoner to kill him. But Mandume instructed his attendants to kill the chief. When they reported the

³²⁶ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 479; idem, 'Mandume', p 226.

³²⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

³²⁸ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 35. A different version - and perhaps a warning of the caution necessary with many of the oral anecdotes surrounding Mandume - relates that when younger, Mandume dressed as a poor man, tricking people and punishing them severely if they did not recognise him and treat him with the respect due to a Kwanyama princeling. Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 219.

³²⁹ Interview with David Haufiku, Ongwediva, 28.12.1989.

deed was done, Wulfhorst suspected Mandume was very satisfied by the news, as were many of his subjects, but in public he appeared angry and demanded an explanation.³³⁰ Mandume also broke royal taboo by personally taking part in battle.³³¹

In conclusion, Mandume may have broken with tradition, but he was also steeped in it. Mandume's reforms were a response to a crisis the Kwanyama polity faced in its last pre-colonial years. In the space of a generation, from the 1880s, power had begun to fragment. This had led to disorder, even 'chaos'.³³² External sources confirm the launch of reformist rule under Mandume. The unfurling of Kaulinge's 'tradition' as he tells it shows a pattern: cycles of disorder followed by the re-imposition of hierarchical order, the latter a process of centralisation under kingship. Mweshipandeka's reign followed a period of dynastic competition;³³³ Mandume's reign followed a dangerous phase of decentralisation by *omalenga*.³³⁴ Both kings followed the same formula. Lineage productivity was promoted with the cultivation of more land and accumulation of cattle. Legal processes and tribute exaction were under royal control. Evidence points to the existence of such a discourse on Mweshipandeka during Mandume's reign.³³⁵ Mandume's reforms could be implemented in the context of a powerful historical precedent; it was a subtle ideological appropriation of the past.

³³⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 90.

³³¹ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, p 34; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 81; Lehmann, 'Die politische', pp 288-91.

³³² Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 40).

³³³ *Ibid.*, pp 32-4.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp 37-42.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp 34-5 and 67. Feierman's analysis of Shambaa discourse is very relevant to the Kwanyama case. See Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals. Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Wisconsin, 1990), pp 94-119.

The assertion of Kwanyama regional hegemony

After the occupation of Ombandja in 1907 and Evale in 1912, Oukwanyama remained the largest and most important independent polity in Angola.³³⁶ But the signs had long been unpropitious. Nande had predicted in 1904 that in a dozen years Oukwanyama would be conquered.³³⁷ He and Weyulu before him had used limited co-operation to forestall this. Both had also, like Mandume, shown outward friendliness towards the Germans; it was noted especially that Weyulu avoided *Gefühlspolitik*, the politics of emotion.³³⁸ Mandume's *Realpolitik* towards the Germans was most noticeable in the large numbers of Kwanyama labour migrants.³³⁹

Realpolitik enabled kings to exploit Luso-German rivalry, which had great potential in view of the disputed boundary. This was scarcely resolved by the 1912 agreement which created a Neutral Zone along the disputed border until exact geographical landmarks could be determined.³⁴⁰ This obliged the Portuguese governor Moura Braz to draw back troops from their fort in Dombondola, which Portugal had claimed as Angolan territory, further north to Naulila on the Kunene river.³⁴¹ The Neutral Zone was an interim solution, but it favoured Germany.³⁴²

Mandume's consistency with his predecessors' *Realpolitik*, however, did not extend to diplomacy towards the Portuguese.³⁴³ His clear and at times militant anti-Portuguese stance showed a break with caution and concessions. Previously, Weyulu and Nande and their advisers had been reluctant to

³³⁶ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 96.

³³⁷ Ibid., pp 75-6.

³³⁸ NAN ZBU JXIII B3 Bd 3, Volkmann (?) - Kaiserl. Gouvernement (No 9121), ca 1901. There is no direct translation of *Gefühlspolitik*; but *Gefühl* translates as emotion, sentiment or feeling. Its opposite is *Realpolitik*.

³³⁹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 78; Pélissier, 'Mandume', p 227.

³⁴⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 96; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

³⁴¹ See map, Appendix 3.

³⁴² Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

³⁴³ AVEM c/k 7 No 21, Wulfhorst, *Unsere Ovambomission*, 1916.

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³⁴⁰ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 96; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

³⁴¹ See map, Appendix 3.

³⁴² Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

³⁴³ AVEM c/k 7 No 21, Wulfhorst, *Unsere Ovambomission*, 1916.

involve themselves in wars against the Portuguese alongside their neighbours, though rebel Kwanyama contingents had taken part in the Luso-Mbandja engagement at Mufilo in 1907. Mandume broke with this precedent when the Vale revolt occurred in 1912.

Prior to the Vale revolt, the first casualty of heightened Luso-Kwanyama tensions was the Catholic mission. When rumours of a Portuguese military expedition against Oukwanyama circulated in early 1912, Mandume sent fighters to burn down the mission, though not to harm persons or property. The Catholics persuaded Mandume not to do so,³⁴⁴ but they themselves were forced to withdraw to Evale when Mandume learned of Portuguese plans to requisition the mission for the military. Very soon afterwards the *chefe* at the Evale fort lured the local and pro-Portuguese king Ivangela into the fort on false pretences and imprisoned him. False reports circulated that the Catholic mission had instigated this. Mandume immediately sent his fighters back to burn down their station in northern Oukwanyama, stating the Catholics had tricked him.³⁴⁵

The much-rumoured Portuguese 'expedition' against the Kwanyama projected for 1912 did not materialise, but matters came to a head for Portuguese forces in Evale. On 15 June 1912, in an effort to liberate their imprisoned king Ivangela, the Vale attacked the Portuguese fort, mobilising an estimated 3,000 to 4,000 fighters, about 2,000 of them Kwanyama. The Portuguese garrison was besieged for some days. Ovambo tactics were unsuited to sieges, whereas the Portuguese were at their most effective. The Ovambo force was finally repulsed. Kavangela's successor Eshekwa was killed, Ivangela was deported to São Tomé, and fierce engagements continued on the peripheries of the fort which rolled back Ovambo resistance. The

³⁴⁴ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 4.2.1913.

³⁴⁵ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 4.2.1913. Mandume invited the Catholics back in 1913 when tensions in Evale had died down, but withdrew this invitation in 1915. AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 12.9.1913; Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 174.

Portuguese ravaged widely around the fort in August to punish the rebels, killing Mandume's most famous fighting *elenga*, Makili.³⁴⁶

This was a serious setback for the Kwanyama. Mandume was now surrounded by belligerent councillors, who asserted that the Kwanyama could easily defeat the Portuguese in battle.³⁴⁷ A prominent fighter, Kalola, had Mandume's approval in conducting his raids deep into Angolan territory, which older councillors argued would provoke a Portuguese invasion.³⁴⁸ Mandume's allies among the *omalenga* had crystallised into a war-party; more temperate heads such as Noyoma, previously a close adviser to Nande,³⁴⁹ had long fallen from prominence.

The Kwanyama suffered at least three further setbacks, in Onkhumbi and Ombandja.³⁵⁰ One large warband sent to attack the Nkhumbi in late 1913 was repulsed and a hundred Kwanyama were captured or killed in unprecedented Nkhumbi resistance. Even hawkish *omalenga*, not liking the taste of defeat, argued against Mandume's proposal to send a new warband and protested at having more of their followers killed. *Omalenga* trickled out of Ondjiva to their own areas, to avoid being despatched west. A second warband was eventually sent across the Kunene, but it proved battle-shy. As the remains of both parties returned with only one captive between them, Mandume punished the first *elenga* among the group.³⁵¹

When Mandume recounted the episode to Wulfhorst, the missionary repeated his conviction that this would draw the Portuguese into Oukwanyama.³⁵² Mandume replied that the Kwanyama would fight them. But the disastrous raid into Onkhumbi led Wulfhorst to believe that Mandume would not attempt raids as frequently in the future. To minimise

³⁴⁶ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

³⁴⁷ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 97.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ De Almeida, *Relatórios*, p 17.

³⁵⁰ RMG *Berichte* 1913, p 101; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

³⁵¹ NAN ZBU WII k2 B3, Wulfhorst - ?, 31.10.1913.

³⁵² AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, pp 97-8.

his reverse, Mandume continually highlighted the two recent defeats suffered by the Kwambi king Ipumbu in raids against the Ngandjera.³⁵³ Wulfhorst believed Mandume would suffer many desertions from his own side if the Portuguese attacked; he needed the support of his *omalenga*, whom he risked antagonising with his rough handling.³⁵⁴

But problems with the Portuguese were precipitated by a more direct *contretemps* in May 1914. Mandume took a very large hunting party beyond the north-eastern Kwanyama border. When he sent two messengers to the Portuguese fort at Kafima, they were shot out of hand.³⁵⁵ In retaliation, Mandume ordered local 'subject' settlements to attack any Portuguese group they encountered.³⁵⁶ When the southern Angolan uprising against Portuguese occupation began in late 1914, this order had important consequences. A Portuguese party travelling from the Kavango river to Onkhumbi was ambushed by Kwanyama fighters. Several were killed, three prisoners and a cannon taken.³⁵⁷ The captives and booty were brought to Ondjiva, where Mandume intended executing the prisoners himself. Wulfhorst intervened, arguing that it was not the custom of German, English or Portuguese to kill prisoners of war.³⁵⁸ Mandume's ensuing change of heart probably had more to do with their value as hostages.³⁵⁹ The prisoners were still alive when Keiling came to plead for them on behalf of the Portuguese government in early 1915,³⁶⁰ though only one remained in Ondjiva. Mandume had sent the

³⁵³ NAN ZBU WII k2 B3, Wulfhorst - ?, 31.10.1913.

³⁵⁴ Ibid; see also AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 93.

³⁵⁵ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse und Erinnerungen aus Südwest-Afrika in der Zeit des Weltkrieges, ca 1910-33; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 6.

³⁵⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33; c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 98.

³⁵⁷ AVEM c/i 20, Wulfhorst, Rückblick, 1917, p 98; c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33; AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 19.5.1914; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 482-3.

³⁵⁸ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.; Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 173.

³⁶⁰ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca.1910-33; AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 20.2.1915; Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, pp 173-8.

other two to Outjo as a gesture to the German administration;³⁶¹ a superb horse was presented to the Kwanyama king in recognition of his co-operation.³⁶²

³⁶¹ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebrisse, ca.1910-33.

³⁶² The Germans were also grateful for a prior favour in May 1914. Mandume had cooperated in handing over an Ovambo guide wanted for killing a trader named Gonzales. NAN ZBU WII k2 B3, Wulfhorst - Schultze, 20.5.1914; Wulfhorst - Schultze, 2.6.1914.

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CHAPTER 5

THE CRUX OF 1914-17: WARS, FAMINE,
RESISTANCE AND OCCUPATION*The Naulila incident*

The incorporation of Ovamboland into two colonial empires in 1915 occurred within a unique set of circumstances. Famine coincided with an international war situation and the heightened imperialist importance of the frontier region. The slide towards direct occupation of the frontier began in 1914. Though Germany and Portugal were not at war, diplomatic strain was severe. Both suspected the other's expansionist designs in south-western Africa and the Portuguese press in particular waged a heated propaganda campaign.¹ The unresolved border question did not help. Portugal feared Germany's intentions towards the fertile upland region of southern Angola; anxieties were fostered by the activities of the *Angolabund*² and the joint project for the linking of the two colonial rail systems.³ Portugal accused the Germans of espionage, both through the railway project and the services of Trekboers on the Huila plateau.⁴ But the greatest source of discord was arms dealing. The Angolan Governor, Norton de Matos, accused the Germans of arming the Ovambos. Indignant German counter-accusations referred to the huge scale of arms circulation in Angola; by contrast, Germany had created '*das von einer Polizeikette abgeschlossene Ovamboland*'.⁵ Both powers had loopholes in their surveillance systems, but smuggling in GSWA was a tiny

¹ *A Provincia*, No 51, 22.10.1915.

² Baericke, *Naulila*, pp 18-20; Alberto de Almeida Teixeira, *Naulila* (Lisbon, 1935), p 8.

³ Voeltz, *German Colonialism*, pp 67 and 69-80.

⁴ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 483.

⁵ Translation: an Ovamboland sealed off with police chains. Baericke, *Naulila*, p 25.

fraction of the massive illegal arms trade passing through Angola, which was linked to the continuing slave trade.⁶ Breech-loading weapons came through Bechuanaland, or from the Congo over the eastern border through Belgian traders.⁷

The upshot was a Portuguese resolution to occupy the border region and the allocation of resources by Lisbon to do so.⁸ As Europe drifted towards war, Portugal had assumed a state of 'conditional neutrality,' where obligations under the old alliance with England could be imposed. This allowed Portugal to step up militarisation in Africa without declaring war, or as Roçadas put it, to remain 'neutral on the continent, belligerent in Angola.'⁹ On 10 September 1914 the first in a series of detachments left Portugal for southern Angola under Roçadas' command.¹⁰ He mobilised intelligence networks from the southern forts of Cuamato, Evale and Lower Cubango, to assess Ovambo reactions towards both Portuguese activities and a possible German invasion. Then, if Botha's South African troops failed to pin down the Germans in the south, Portugal planned to invade Ondonga as Britain's ally.¹¹ However, the Naulila incident of 1914 precipitated conflict between Germany and Portugal much sooner than either side expected.¹²

Since the outbreak of World War 1 Britain had blockaded German ports, causing GSWA to face possible supply shortages. The feasibility of

⁶ Rhodes House Library, Papers of the Anti-Slavery Society, Slavery in Portuguese West Africa, J 26, *The British Friend*, August 1913.

⁷ NAN ZBU A1 H2 Bd 1, Dorbritz - Reichskanzler, 12.8.1904.

⁸ CNDIH Codice 568/1-1-40, Conselho do Governo, Norton de Matos, Acto de Sessão de 8.9.1914; AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 2.10.1914; see also Cesar Augusto de Oliveira Moura Braz, *Districto da Huila. Ano de 1912*, (Lisbon, 1918), p 76.

⁹ Teixeira, *Naulila*, p 14.

¹⁰ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 483.

¹¹ Teixeira, *Naulila*, p 6.

¹² Naulila in 1914 was a small police post in Hinga territory, close to the Kunene River on the Portuguese-designated side of the Luso-German frontier. It had been set up to replace the military post Paiva Couceiro in Dombondola, established by Joao de Almeida but evacuated in 1912 because it fell within the newly-agreed neutral zone. AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des Missions 1911-1930, *La Guerre Mondiale*, p 141; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 481.

Angola as an alternative source of provisions was tested in October 1914.¹³ A consignment of goods was purchased in Luanda for despatch to SWA and arrived in southern Angola *en route* for the border. Instructed by Governor Seitz, Schulze-Jena, the Administrator of Outjo, personally travelled north with an armed escort to seek Portuguese permission to meet the supply wagons.¹⁴

On 17 October 1914 Schulze-Jena's presence became known to the Portuguese border posts.¹⁵ While he waited for the Governor of Humbe's response to his request for a meeting and permission to enter Angola, an exchange of visits was made between the German camp on the Kunene and nearby Naulila fort. At Naulila, Schulze-Jena was shot dead by a Portuguese trooper as he prepared to leave.¹⁶ In the ensuing *melée*, two of the German party were captured, but one escaped to report back to Schulze-Jena's camp.¹⁷

German reprisals followed. A Portuguese fort in the Kavango was attacked,¹⁸ but the real confrontation followed. A punitive expedition commanded by Major Franke arrived at the Kunene river in December 1914,¹⁹ having advanced rapidly through the extreme west of Ovamboland. The Ovambo, who refer to this episode as the War of Franke,²⁰ took subtle advantage of the situation. Both the Ngandjera and Kwambi mildly

¹³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, p 45; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 483.

¹⁴ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2*, pp 80-1; Baericke, *Naulila*, p 50.

¹⁵ Teixeira, *Naulila*, p 10.

¹⁶ Portuguese and German accounts diverge sharply as to how Schulze-Jena came to be shot. The Portuguese version relates that after breakfast in Naulila fort, Schulze-Jena suddenly decided to leave the fort. When his host Lieutenant Sereno attempted to remonstrate, Schulze-Jena pointed his gun at him while mounted. At this tricky moment he was shot. See AHM cx 161, No 9, *Auto de averiguações sobre Naulila, Huila, 1915*; AHM cx 161 No 19, *Incidentes no Sul de Angola entre forças Portuguesas e Alemas*, n.d.; Teixeira, *Naulila*, pp 12-3. In the German account, Schulze-Jena was impelled by the suspicious circumstances surrounding his invitation to the fort to leave, and upon mounting and turning his horse, he was shot for no reason. See Baericke, *Naulila*, p 55.

¹⁷ Baericke, *Naulila*, p 55.

¹⁸ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 483.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p 484.

²⁰ Interview with Simpson Ndatipo, Nakayale, Ombalantu, 3.11.1989.

obstructed the advance of the punitive expedition.²¹ Ipumbu²² and Mandume²³ sent messages to the Portuguese to warn them of the advance of the Germans. Mandume also gave Sheetekela men and arms to re-take his Mbandja kingdom from the Portuguese.²⁴ Teixeira records that the 'turned' Mbandja lookouts and snipers sent to meet the German column rapidly deserted on discovering that their exiled king Sheetekela was in its train.²⁵

In the attack on Naulila on 18 December 1914 the Portuguese were routed, losing 69 dead, 76 wounded and 37 captured. Franke's small expeditionary party lost three officers; the commander himself was wounded.²⁶ Not having the means to pursue their advantage, the Germans withdrew from Naulila immediately to the Finnish mission in Uukwaluudhi, where their wounded received medical assistance. Roçadas however gravely feared a three-pronged German attack. His apprehension was mistaken, a symptom of insecurity and the product of faulty intelligence. Germany had not declared war with Portugal and could, moreover, ill afford a military invasion of Angola when already confronted with Botha's sixty thousand troops in the south. But the Portuguese did not take these realities into account.²⁷

Roçadas decided to abandon the line of southern frontier forts altogether, which were judged to be insufficiently manned and fortified, with poor communications, to withstand German attack.²⁸ Orders were sent out

²¹ Baericke, *Naulila*, pp 46-9.

²² Ernesto Machado, *No Sul de Angola* (Lisbon, 1956), p 116; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 484.

²³ Rocadas, *Relatório*, p 166; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 484.

²⁴ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 55).

²⁵ Teixeira, *Naulila*, p 24; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 484. Despite Teixeira's implication, no clear evidence emerges that Franke reached an agreement with Sheetekela or Mandume to re-instate the former, and it is doubtful that time or route allowed Franke the elaboration of such a policy. It is probable that Sheetekela seized his moment on the basis of Ovambo intelligence of German movements, and followed in the wake of the column.

²⁶ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, *Situation des Missions 1911-1930, La Guerre Mondiale*, p 141.

²⁷ AHM cx 85, *Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915*, 9.4.1924.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

successively to withdraw from the forts in Cuamato, Conguena, Humbe, Roçadas, Kafima and Evale.²⁹ This precipitated a flight north by troops, officials and white traders towards the safety of Ongambwe.³⁰ Roçadas was among the first to depart, having ordered the blowing-up of his namesake fort on the Kunene, in order to prevent, as he thought, the German seizure of its ammunition.³¹

Southern Angolan uprising

News of the Portuguese defeat at Naulila and their subsequent withdrawal spread almost instantaneously along the plateau, floodplain and lower Cubango. For subject peoples it was the supreme moment to throw back the colonial frontiers. No time was lost in besieging the remaining Portuguese forces in police posts and forts. As they witnessed the withdrawal of all whites from Humbe, Dongoena, Kafu, Chiteve and Munongue, almost every community came out in revolt and goods and property were seized.³² People furnished themselves above all with arms; this was later to be extremely important for self-defence, for exchange during the coming famine and for banditry by displaced groups such as the Mbandja. According to Norton de Matos, the Portuguese lost or abandoned a huge arsenal comprising over one thousand rifles, nearly two million rounds of ammunition, hundreds of grenades, four machine guns, two cannons, and nineteen other artillery pieces.³³

²⁹ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 27.12.1914; CNDIH Codice 568, Conselho do Governo, Acta de Sessão de 24.12.1914; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 485.

³⁰ AHU 1R 2S P22, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915.

³¹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 485.

³² AHU 1R 2S 22P, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915; AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, La Guerre Mondiale, pp 141-2; BG 28, 1915-17, p 11.

³³ AHM cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924.

Whites themselves were attacked: it showed the 'accumulated hatreds' of the southern Angolans.³⁴ Portuguese troops and traders withdrawing from Damaquero in Ombandja were attacked on the 19th December; troops under assault in Otokero sought refuge in the now empty Damaquero fort but were ambushed by Mbandja fighters. They made a rush for the Kunene river, but some were killed while crossing. Nalueque fort was burned down, its three white troops killed and black troops scattered. Mbandja fighters attacked the soldiers from Fort Cuamato as they struggled through the Pembe valley, killing one third of their troops. Between 18 and 19 December 1914, the Mbandja had completely expelled their occupiers.³⁵ Portuguese military departure from Humbe fort, which had failed to hold off an attack on 31 December 1914, meant that the nearest point of Portuguese occupation was now Ongambwe.³⁶

Mishaps of the withdrawing forces multiplied. The commanders of the Kafima and Evale forts were ordered to join up and retreat to Lubango via Cassinga, but the Kafima garrison was intercepted by a joint force of Kwanyama and Vale fighters and virtually annihilated.³⁷ Their fate remained unknown for some time. The Vale *elenga* Mwatilefu flushed the Portuguese out of the Evale fort by sending a false message that the Germans were coming. They marched into his trap two hours later. Twelve were killed and the survivors of the ambush - 'poor defeated and demoralised soldiers'³⁸ - arrived at the Catholic mission under a hail of bullets.³⁹ Keiling's intervention

³⁴ AHU 1R 2S 22P, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915.

³⁵ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 486.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp 486 and 488.

³⁷ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama - Evale - Mupa, pp 204-5; AHU 1R 2S 22P, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915. This was the party whose survivors were taken as prisoners to Mandume (see Chapter 4).

³⁸ Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 161.

³⁹ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, La Guerre Mondiale, p 142; Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 159.

saved them from extermination. This heightened the risks the mission faced as the sole remaining white presence in the hostile south.⁴⁰

The period of this uprising and spurt of independence was curt: roughly nine months. For those polities which had been occupied and whose former leaders had been deposed or exiled, it was frequently a vigorous re-assertion of pre-occupation ruling sections. Sheetekela was a case in point. The prominence of Mwatilefu in Evale, brother of the previous king executed by the Portuguese, showed a similar concern with restoring the old social order. In addition, they could arm themselves, not only against future Portuguese attack, but against internal challenges as well. The uprising appears in documentation as virtually undifferentiated; it is difficult to assess the internal impact of restoration, and whether any reprisals against 'collaborators' occurred.

Once the Portuguese colonial frontier had receded, Oukwanyama became the most dominant regional power. This stemmed from its size and armed force, as well as its unbroken independence from direct colonial interference. Mandume certainly had hegemonic ambitions, though previously he had been unable to achieve such outright dominance. He was now successful both in raiding and in dominance over the satellite polities such as Evale and Ombandja. Catholic missionaries in southern Angola were quick to appreciate Mandume's position. 'It is he now who is the great ruler of the whole of Ovamboland, having named chiefs for all the surrounding lands.'⁴¹ Mwatilefu in Evale was no more than Mandume's 'vassal', according to Keiling;⁴² obtaining Mandume's protection for his mission in Evale was an extra incentive to visit the Kwanyama king in January 1915, alongside his

⁴⁰ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 20.2.1915; 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama - Evale - Mupa, p 204; BG 28 1915-17, pp 11-12.

⁴¹ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 20.2.1915.

⁴² Keiling, *Quarenta Anos*, p 163.

mandate to negotiate the release of Portuguese captives from Kafima.⁴³ The regional hegemony exercised by Mandume in this short period saw the imposition of considerable control and order. This was in contrast to the situation which developed between 1915 and 1917, when joint occupation by two colonial powers fostered anarchy and banditry on the uncertain frontier.

Seeds of the great famine

The sheer scale of the famine in Ovamboland which met incoming colonial observers in 1915 made it appear a dramatic slide into destitution, disease and death. But its pre-indications, in the regional conditions and famine strategies pursued prior to 1915, need examination. As Rangasami argues, we need to 'identify the various factors, political, social, psychological and economic, that operate to keep large classes of people under continual pressure.'⁴⁴

Rautanen noted from forty-five years observation that famine was periodic.⁴⁵ Alternating cycles of six to seven good harvests were usually followed by a succession of bad harvests of roughly equal duration. Famine followed chiefly from drought, partly through locust infestations and occasionally through excessive flooding, most notably in 1909.⁴⁶ Between 1908 and 1916 missionaries in the floodplain and southern Angola registered greater rainfall irregularity than usual.⁴⁷ The 1908 famine has already been

⁴³ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling -TRP, 27.12.1914; Keiling - TRP, 20.2.1915; NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 2, pp 81-2.

⁴⁴ Amrita Rangasami, "Failure of Exchange Entitlements" Theory of Famine, A Response', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XX No 41, 1985, p 1800.

⁴⁵ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health conditions, 31.12.1915.

mentioned; this spilled over into early 1909 when 'general hunger' persisted.⁴⁸ In 1909 and 1910, continual and torrential rains hampered good harvests. In southern Angola in 1911 famine was reported by Spiritan missionaries. Ongambwe in 1912 experienced a disastrous drought, leading to a 'black famine',⁴⁹ with an estimated one third mortality rate in some interior districts. Compounding this southern Angolan calamity was the loss of considerable numbers of cattle through a serious epizootic in large stock.⁵⁰ Destocking resulted in both Ongambwe and the environs of Ovamboland, though in the former it was exacerbated by the colonial imposition of taxation.⁵¹ 1911 in Oukwanyama was also a year of drought and famine.⁵² Missionaries described people's state of mind as 'confused'.⁵³ The improvement following the 1912 harvest⁵⁴ did not last more than one season.

Early 1915 saw the first indications of widespread catastrophic drought.⁵⁵ Rainfall at the turn of 1914-5 was very sparse; in southern Angola nearly all harvests failed and there was barely enough seed for the next season.⁵⁶ In Ongangela, where entire villages had been abandoned in search of manioc elsewhere, the first famine deaths were reported.⁵⁷

It soon transpired that Ovamboland was very seriously affected.⁵⁸ Keiling wrote in January 1916 that not one drop of rain had fallen in Ovamboland for the last two years.⁵⁹ Even before the scanty harvest of 1915,

⁴⁸ AVEM c/h 52, Namakunde, Hochstrate, Jahresbericht 4.1.1909; NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health conditions, 31.12.1915.

⁴⁹ BG 27 1913-4, 'Mission du Cunene'.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 23.10.1911; NAN RCO Vol 11, Unregistered Correspondence IV, Relief Measures 1915-6, Memorandum.

⁵³ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 23.10.1911.

⁵⁴ AVEM c/h 52, Namakunde, Sckär - Deputation, Quartelbericht 15.4.1912.

⁵⁵ BG 28 1915-17, p 188.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p 500.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p 504.

⁵⁸ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama - Evale - Mupa, p 206; BG 28 1915-17, p 500.

⁵⁹ BG 28 1915-17, p 255.

many Kwanyama were roving about seeking grain.⁶⁰ A caterpillar infestation destroyed most of this meagre harvest, which earned the famine one of its names, *ondjala yokapuka*, the famine of the insects.⁶¹ The incidence of caterpillars and their impact were varied. In some places they provided a respite from the unrelenting hunger, because caterpillars could be consumed,⁶² though in Oukwanyama the insects destroyed much of the 1915 and first post-drought millet crop.⁶³ In Ombandja, where the remaining population struggled to live off meat and water melons, most of the latter were destroyed by insects. When the spoiled fruit was eaten, chronic stomach ailments followed.⁶⁴

In what Watts terms the 'social and temporal gradations' in famine behaviour,⁶⁵ a widespread initial response to scarcity is the intensification of fall-back activities, such as gathering wild foods. Northern Ovambo were reported to be gathering edible roots and fruits from trees along the Caculovai river in the early stages of the famine. The forest belts between settled areas also saw much foraging by women.⁶⁶ Foraging, however, was seasonal. In Ovamboland it was illegal to cut down fruit trees, including the ubiquitous palm. But the pith, consumed either raw or cooked, was an important famine food.⁶⁷ Palm trees were felled in 1915, just as they had been in 1870,⁶⁸

⁶⁰ AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulfhorst, Der Kriegszug der Portugiesen gegen Mandume, ca 1910-33; interview with Petrus Ndonga, Odibo, 23.11.1989.

⁶¹ Interview with Konis Imene and Aune Shaningwa, Onampadhi, 4.11.1989.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulfhorst, Der Kriegszug, ca 1910-33; interview with Alina Heita, Onamukulo, 11.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 119); interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 104).

⁶⁴ Interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 194).

⁶⁵ Michael Watts, *Silent Violence. Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), p 140.

⁶⁶ BG 28 1915-17, p 255. Machado argues that the Mbandja were an exception and apathy prevented them from engaging in such survival strategies; see Carlos Roma Machado, 'O desvio das aguas do Rio Cunene e a região,' *BSGL Ser 39*, Nos 7-12, jul-dez 1921.

⁶⁷ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

indicating the severity of shortage. People also cooked old ox-hides.⁶⁹ Those who did not practise the correct methods of treating the hides suffered gastric problems.⁷⁰

The Ovambo had developed a complex of strategies in a long history of famine survival. In years of scarcity, they depended primarily on surplus from the previous harvest, evolving efficient storage systems to this end. Successive harvest shortfall had destroyed this security for most Ovambo by 1915.⁷¹ As Genié argued, the Ovambo had been in a more or less famine situation since 1910.⁷² The second and most important famine strategy across Ovamboland was for households to barter for grain with less affected neighbouring areas where harvests had been sufficient to allow an exchange of the surplus, either within the floodplain or with communities in the better-watered north.⁷³

Because famine was not localised in 1915,⁷⁴ scarcity to the north of Ovamboland had serious consequences for people migrating there to attempt barter.⁷⁵ As Ngangela showed, there had been great migrations from these regions⁷⁶ and Ovambo who sought food there found places long abandoned from hunger and despair. People were apprehensive about the future; Rhenish missionaries told their congregations that the war in the south with South African forces had destroyed any hope of German government famine relief.⁷⁷ As the Portuguese army was poised to invade Oukwanyama, people

⁶⁹ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht 28.6.1916; interview with Petrus Ndongo, Odibo, 23.11.1989.

⁷⁰ Interview with Sandell Michael, Omaalala, 2.11.1989.

⁷¹ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health conditions, 31.12.1915; NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

⁷² BG 28 1915-17, p 500.

⁷³ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Interview with Petrus Ndongo, Odibo, 23.11.1989.

⁷⁶ BG 28 1915-17, p 530.

⁷⁷ AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulfhorst, Der Kriegszug, ca 1910-33.

were already dying in scattered locations from starvation.⁷⁸ Large migratory movements had commenced. This was only the beginning. It became increasingly a question of surviving a terrible conjunction of scarcity and violence.

Portuguese occupation 1915

The threat of German troops entering Angola after fighting Botha in the south justified the expense of Portugal's largest military expedition to Angola of that date. The expedition reached Mossamedes on 7 April 1915,⁷⁹ having stopped in Luanda for a briefing by the governors of Lunda and Congo districts as to the disrupting effects in their regions of the southern rebellion.⁸⁰ The expedition had three aims: firstly to reoccupy the areas which had been abandoned after the Naulila *débâcle*; secondly to occupy Oukwanyama; thirdly to prepare for a possible retreat of German troops from South West Africa into Angola, should pressure from Botha's troops precipitate such a situation.⁸¹ The Military Commander Pereira de Eça was simultaneously appointed Governor of Angola. He proved both efficient and ruthless. Constrained by having to occupy the south before the onset of rains,⁸² Pereira de Eça overcame the logistical problems of landing and transporting troops and heavy artillery to the interior at some speed.⁸³ Boer auxiliaries were enlisted in considerable numbers.⁸⁴

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha do Sul de Angola. Relatório do General Pereira de Eça* (Lisbon, 1922), p 64.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p 63; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 489.

⁸¹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 63; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 489.

⁸² Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 62; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 491; Alberto de Almeida Teixeira, *O General Pereira de Eça no Cuanhama* (Lisbon, 1935), p 17; *A Provincia*, No 50, 15.10.1915.

⁸³ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 14; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 489.

⁸⁴ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 76; Teixeira, *O General*, p 15.

The expedition was broken down into detachments. One travelled to Cassinga to assess the situation in Cubango.⁸⁵ A second detachment was sent to Onkhumbi, occupying the fort on 7 July without local resistance.⁸⁶ The impact of drought and famine now began to strike the Portuguese, whose troops faced a serious lack of water.⁸⁷ The population they encountered in Onkhumbi was almost exclusively the old, women and children, all of whom were 'like skeletons'. Information gleaned locally elicited the news that most younger men had crossed the Kunene into Ombandja and Oukwanyama.⁸⁸

While preparing for his major thrust into Ombandja and the Kwanyama heartland,⁸⁹ Pereira de Eça learned in Lubango the 'most disagreeable news' of the whole expedition. The Germans in SWA had surrendered to General Botha.⁹⁰ The overriding purpose of the expedition became the conquest of the Kwanyama,⁹¹ whose fighting numbers were exaggerated to between 80,000 and 100,000.⁹² In Portuguese military documentation, 'the enemy' comprised the whole of Oukwanyama, Ombandja, Evale, some Kwambi defectors from Ipumbu, and so-called Nkhumbi fugitives.⁹³ Their military discourse, fed to politicians and the press in Lisbon, played on a range of insecurities. The Kwanyama had been trained

⁸⁵ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 74; Teixeira, *O General*, p 15.

⁸⁶ AHU Telegramas de Angola, 1915, Gambos, Secretario-Geral - Loanda, 12.7.1915; *A Provincia*, No 50, 15.10.1915; Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 79; Teixeira, *O General*, p 17; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

⁸⁷ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 79.

⁸⁸ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 79.

⁸⁹ Pereira de Eça had amassed here 372 officers, 10 049 troops and 71 cannons and machine guns. Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

⁹⁰ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 80; BG 28 1915-17, p 478; *A Provincia*, No 51, 22.10.1915; Teixeira, *O General*, p 18; Israel Goldblatt, *History of South West Africa* (Cape Town, 1971), p 204; for a prelude see AGCSSp 476-A-IV, *Situation des missions 1911-1930*, La Guerre Mondiale, p 142; AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 15.4.1915; Goepf - TRP, 7.7.1915.

⁹¹ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924.

⁹² Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, pp 80-1; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 491. The source of these figures was João de Almeida, governor of the south, anxious to convince Lisbon of the necessity to invest in military conquest of Oukwanyama.

⁹³ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 80.

by the Germans,⁹⁴ their morale was high after Naulila,⁹⁵ and there was the 'Kwanyama element' - that because they had never been subjugated, they infected all other groups with a steely temper of resistance.⁹⁶ The Kwanyama were also said to be more 'civilised' than surrounding peoples.⁹⁷ Such ethnic portrayal of the Kwanyama as an advanced warlike people enhanced the dangers and prestige of conquest. Though they had been defeated, the 'German element' in the background served a similar purpose in the discourse.⁹⁸

To cut possible alliances between Ovambo groups, the expedition was divided into detachments. The first and largest⁹⁹ was destined for Oukwanyama, under Pereira de Eça's personal command. The second, the *Destacamento de Cuamato*, was to reoccupy Ombandja. A third was to retake Evale, and a fourth Dongoena and Naulila, the latter also covering the rapids at Ruacana.¹⁰⁰

The third detachment reoccupied Dongoena and Evale virtually without resistance.¹⁰¹ Famine was a tremendous factor in the Portuguese advance, but Pereira de Eça also use the 'politics of terror'¹⁰² to great effect.

Many of the natives in southern Angola were rebellious at that time but many, especially in Gambos, were not guilty... When General Pereira de Eça reached Gambos he hanged a number of natives of that tribe who had been called up by the Chief and

⁹⁴ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; AHU 1R 2S 22P, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915.

⁹⁵ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 81.

⁹⁶ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Teixeira, *O General*, p 24.

⁹⁷ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 81.

⁹⁸ CNDIH Codice 568, 1-1-40, Conselho do Governo, Acto da sessão de 24.12.1914; AHU 1R 2S 22P, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915; Julio Gonçalves, *Sul d'Angola e o Quadrado da Môngua na Epopeia Nacional d'Africa. Notas dum expedicionário de 1914 a 1915* (Lisbon, 1926), p 151.

⁹⁹ The *Destacamento do Cuanhama* consisted of roughly three thousand troops: 103 officers, 2420 white soldiers, 98 auxiliaries (both Portuguese and Boer settlers) and 127 black soldiers.

¹⁰⁰ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, pp 81-2.

¹⁰¹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 87; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

¹⁰² Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

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⁹⁵ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 81.

⁹⁶ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Teixeira, *O General*, p 24.

⁹⁷ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 81.

⁹⁸ CNDIH Codice 568, 1-1-40, Conselho do Governo, Acto da sessão de 24.12.1914; AHU 1R 2S 22P, Norton de Matos - Ministro das Colonias, 6.3.1915; Julio Gonçalves, *Sul d' Angola e o Quadrado da Môngua na Epopea Nacional d' Africa. Notas dum expedicionário de 1914 a 1915* (Lisbon, 1926), p 151.

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¹⁰⁰ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, pp 81-2.

¹⁰¹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 87; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

¹⁰² Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

not fearing treachery came and thus were summarily executed.¹⁰³

The series of executions which accompanied military re-occupation drove underground or towards Oukwanyama much potential localised resistance.¹⁰⁴ Famine was aggravated by Portuguese seizure of cattle and goats which left many without their last food resource,¹⁰⁵ causing migration to increase. Ombandja was an extreme case. The two kingdoms became fragmented and depopulated,¹⁰⁶ scattering refugee groups across the southern floodplain.¹⁰⁷ After initial resistance¹⁰⁸ Sheetekela returned to Oukwanyama for the second time in his career.¹⁰⁹ The king of Greater Ombandja was executed after a military engagement;¹¹⁰ his successor Vaifeni led an exile group into western Ovamboland and later committed suicide.¹¹¹

During the reoccupation of Ombandja, the *Destacamento do Cuanhama* made its painful progress through parched country towards Mandume's borders, covering about eight kilometres a day.¹¹² Monteiro later calculated the number of Ovambo fighters at fifty thousand, with five thousand utilising modern rifles, well supplied with ammunition. He conceded that the mass of this army disposed of assegais, small axes, bush knives and knob-kerries.¹¹³ However, even Monteiro's reduced figure is an exaggeration. Pritchard's

¹⁰³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs Vol 2* p 83. The Ngambwe chief was also executed. Pereira de Eça's reason was their failure to provide porters and food for the Expedition. See Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 490.

¹⁰⁴ For Dongoena and Hinga see Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 490-1.

¹⁰⁵ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924.

¹⁰⁶ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 492.

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 194-5); interview with Olavi Twamoneni, Okalongo, 29.12.1989.

¹⁰⁸ *A Provincia*, No 50, 15.10.1915.

¹⁰⁹ Teixeira, *O General*, p 22; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 492.

¹¹⁰ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 87.

¹¹¹ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC - Missionary Alho, 10.7.1917; interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 195). In colonial records Vaifeni is referred to as Mongela.

¹¹² Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 88.

¹¹³ Monteiro, *Pacificação*.

estimate for the total Kwanyama population in 1915 was fifty thousand;¹¹⁴ even including all the alleged Mbandja, Kwambi and Nkhumbi¹¹⁵ fighters the figure for Mandume's army could not have exceeded twenty or at most thirty thousand.

Spies watched the Portuguese reach the outskirts of Oukwanyama along the *oshana*. Finally, on 16 August 1915, the vanguard signalled a concentration of Kwanyama fighters at the Omongwa waterholes.¹¹⁶ These waterholes became the crucial point of conflict between the two armies.¹¹⁷ The detachment crossed the Kwanyama frontier guarded by the *elenga* Kalola the next day and were met with fierce rifle fire.¹¹⁸ It was probably from about this time that people within Oukwanyama heard the cannons which they thought at first to be thunder.¹¹⁹ 'The restless times began. The whole of Oukwanyama was now put on a war footing, men streaming through the entire land.'¹²⁰ There is evidence that famine made mobilisation very difficult¹²¹ and that the invasion caught Mandume unprepared.¹²² The remaining Portuguese prisoner was executed at this point.

Pereira de Eça later conceded Kwanyama tactical superiority.¹²³ Their army, composed of units of a hundred men, the *etanga*, exploited the terrain well. Six units were commanded by one *elenga*, who went mounted for greater

¹¹⁴ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, pp 11 and 21.

¹¹⁵ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924.

¹¹⁶ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 88. See map, Appendix 3.

¹¹⁷ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 492-3.

¹¹⁸ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; *A Provincia*, No 50, 15.10.1915; Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 88; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 492; Gonçalves, *Quadrado da Môngua*, p 146.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Jeremia Benjamin, Oshigambo, 2.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 150). The other supposition was that Mandume was experimenting with his captured Portuguese cannon. Wulforst described how it soon dawned on people that, the season being wrong, and the cannon having no ammunition, it was neither. AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulforst, *Erlebnisse*, ca 1910-33.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*; NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, pp 493-4.

mobility. Faced with the 'tactics of dispersal,' the Portuguese command responded from the first day of battle with a cohesive square formation.¹²⁴ Artillery fire was used to draw away the enemy fire allowing cavalry to strike into the bush where the fighters were located.¹²⁵ But the Kwanyama started killing transport oxen and succeeded in breaking the Portuguese lines of communication. Numerous supply wagons were abandoned. It became crucial for the Portuguese to reach viable water points.¹²⁶ On the first day, the detachment edged forward to waterholes which were found to be dry.¹²⁷ Scouts located water two kilometres ahead; this dictated Pereira de Eça's decision to fight on towards these the next day.

The following morning, 18 August, the Kwanyama attacked from both north and east, taking the Portuguese by surprise.¹²⁸ The Kwanyama used tree cover and sand mounds very effectively to close in on the enemy, despite heavy cannon and machine gun bombardment. In this short exchange the invaders suffered serious losses in officers, troops and stock.¹²⁹ Pereira de Eça grew anxious about his own consumption of ammunition and the apparent amount at the enemy's disposal.¹³⁰ That night they entrenched in the same spot, sustaining a further attack. Pereira de Eça confessed he had not expected such a series of hard assaults. At this point he decided to call the Cuamato Detachment to make a feint on Ondjiva, which might divide the Kwanyama attack.¹³¹

Fighting continued on 19 August. No response had come to his demand for assistance and a second messenger was despatched to

¹²⁴ Teixeira, *O General*, p 26.

¹²⁵ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924.

¹²⁶ Teixeira, *O General*, p 26.

¹²⁷ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 91.

¹²⁸ Ibid.; Teixeira, *O General*, p 26.

¹²⁹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, pp 91-2; Teixeira, *O General*, pp 29-30; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 492.

¹³⁰ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, pp 92-3; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 492.

¹³¹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 93; Teixeira, *O General*, p 22.

Ombandja.¹³² But that same afternoon, the main body of his troops fought its way bitterly down to the waterholes. This was of great importance to the troops psychologically, let alone to their physical survival and that of their draught oxen. New trenches were dug on the spot.¹³³ By this time the Kwanyama had lost many of their most experienced fighters.¹³⁴ Their casualties were enormous, unsurprising in view of the gunnery they faced. Famine had also greatly weakened their fighting stamina.¹³⁵

Mandume led battle on the last day. The strongest resources in the Kwanyama religious imagination were called upon, as Wulfhorst recalled in his account of the morning before Mandume went to the battlefield:

He [Mandume] was very distracted. All the women and girls of his household came in file towards him. Each one knelt down and greeted him: 'Uncle, are you come?' 'Yes, I have come.' Then the majority of them entreated him: 'Uncle, the spirits of the ancestors can help you to defeat the enemy.' I [Wulfhorst] listened for a while, then said, 'Mandume, what help can the spirits of the dead bring you? None at all. You must fight yourselves for your land and life!' He answered: 'Be silent! Don't say anything! Let them speak!'¹³⁶

On this third day of battle, 20 August, the Kwanyama were forced to acknowledge defeat. Fighting was fierce: 'the natives attacked in great numbers, displaying reckless bravery and approaching to within 120 yards of the Portuguese trenches.'¹³⁷ But the latter could not be dislodged.¹³⁸ By mid-afternoon, Pereira de Eça ordered several counter-attacks. After several abortive efforts to break the Kwanyama offensive, a decisive push was

¹³² Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 93.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp 93-4.

¹³⁴ BG 28 1915-17, p 478.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*; interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 73).

¹³⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, *Erlebniße*, ca 1910-33.

¹³⁷ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 8.

¹³⁸ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 95; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 493.

made.¹³⁹ At the end of the day the Portuguese gained the upper hand, but it had taken ten solid hours of pounding.¹⁴⁰

The Kwanyama withdrew from the battlefield, leaving thousands dead, dying and wounded, mutilated by the heavy artillery fire.¹⁴¹ The Portuguese took no prisoners.¹⁴² Kwanyama bodies were later piled into the trenches they had struggled to reach, doused with petrol and burned.¹⁴³

South African occupation

Mandume headed away from the field, his best fighters lost and the remnants of his force fragmented. He returned to Ondjiva, in desperate straits. The Portuguese themselves were in a critical situation until they re-established their communications with the Kunene;¹⁴⁴ until the Cuamato Detachment arrived they remained at Omongwa. But the intention was to occupy Ondjiva and capture or kill Mandume. During these critical days in Ondjiva, news came of the arrival of Major Pritchard in Ondonga, representing the new administration of the Union Government of South Africa in SWA.

Pritchard's appearance was the third great event of 1915 in Ovamboland, coming after the famine and the Portuguese expedition. In his opinion:

¹³⁹ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 96.

¹⁴⁰ AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 493.

¹⁴¹ Teixeira, *O General*, p 33.

¹⁴² Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 8.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p 8. The Portuguese calculated four to five thousand Kwanyama dead, but this was later questioned and was probably an exaggeration. See NAN RCO 10/1916/1, RC - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 14.5.1916; AHM 2D 2S cx 85, Conferencia sobre a Campanha do Sul de Angola em 1915, 9.4.1924; Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 493.

¹⁴⁴ Pereira de Eça, *A Campanha*, p 100; Teixeira, *O General*, p 38.

It will be difficult to imagine so unique an opportunity of establishing a political administration in a country [in] which, in other circumstances, resistance to authority might with reason have been anticipated.¹⁴⁵

Mandume and his remaining *omalenga* saw in Pritchard's coming the possibility of protection against the Portuguese; Wulforth commented that it was a case of the proverbial drowning man.¹⁴⁶ Mandume sent Pritchard urgent messages and the Ndonga king Martin ka Dikwa also argued his case. As a result, Pritchard travelled to Oukwanyama on 29 August, informing Wulforth that his party had known nothing of Portuguese military occupation. They had come north to inform Ovambo leaders that SWA was now 'British' and to recruit labour.¹⁴⁷

Mandume's position was one of 'great disappointment... How different everything had been only a few months ago!'¹⁴⁸ When negotiations between the Union Government representatives and Mandume began, Wulforth was collected by car to act as interpreter. 'We passed Mandume on the road,' he recalled. 'He refused to ride in the car as he did not trust the English.'¹⁴⁹ When questioned by Pritchard, Mandume argued he was blameless in provoking a Portuguese attack and requested assistance.¹⁵⁰ 'He would rather give his land to the English than to the Portuguese.'¹⁵¹ Pritchard brought him up sharp: 'It was no longer his land, of which he could freely dispose. The Anglo-Portuguese border must be respected.'¹⁵² Mandume had difficulty in accepting this, and became 'very downcast' the next day when the Portuguese reply to Pritchard's letter arrived.¹⁵³ It castigated Mandume for 'rebellion'

¹⁴⁵ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 13.

¹⁴⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulforth, *Erlebnisse*, ca 1910-33.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 6. Wulforth acted as interpreter between Pritchard and Mandume; his account of negotiations contains more detail than Pritchard's report.

¹⁵¹ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulforth, *Erlebnisse*, ca 1910-33.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

against Portuguese sovereignty,¹⁵⁴ creating a situation in which Pritchard argued his administration could not intervene.¹⁵⁵

But Pritchard did hold out one alternative for the Kwanyama king. He offered Union protection in that part of Oukwanyama which fell within SWA. Mandume would come under the authority of a Resident Commissioner (RC) and would no longer have power of life or death over his subjects. 'In short,' wrote Wulfhorst, 'he would in future become a very dependent chief.'¹⁵⁶ Mandume angrily departed from the negotiations to consult his headmen. They reached a consensus on accepting British protection.¹⁵⁷ Mandume put his allegiance in writing.¹⁵⁸

News now came that Portuguese forces were very close to Ondjiva.

Mandume was already very depressed. At this news he then sat and cried like a child; he saw that things were now in earnest. He then demanded a horse to return to his kraal, though the Portuguese were coming nearer all the time.¹⁵⁹

Mandume galloped back to Ondjiva and ordered the royal *embala* burned.¹⁶⁰ As it went up in flames the next day, many Kwanyama began streaming south. The Portuguese found the smoking ruins on 4 September.¹⁶¹ Their own troops, debilitated by thirst and hunger and harried by Kalola and a remaining guerrilla group,¹⁶² were preceded by the tougher Boer auxiliaries who entered Ondjiva first.¹⁶³

The occupiers seized stock, burned down settlements and grain stores. Executions also followed.

¹⁵⁴ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, Annex 5, p 17.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p 7; AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, *Erlebnisse*, ca 1910-33.

¹⁵⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, *Erlebnisse*, ca 1910-33.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, Annex 6, pp 17-8.

¹⁵⁹ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, *Erlebnisse*, ca 1910-33.

¹⁶⁰ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 7.

¹⁶¹ Pélissier, *Guerres Grises*, p 495.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ NAN A 233, William Chapman, *Memoirs* Vol 2.

In Cuanhama too some were executed... without any trial which was a disgrace to the Government [,] as those natives were simply fighting for their country which the Portuguese had never subjugated... it was unfair and inhuman.¹⁶⁴

Brutalities by black auxiliaries also found a lasting place in Kwanyama oral culture.¹⁶⁵

Ondjala yawekomba - the famine that swept

As Mandume left the burning *embala* at Ondjiva and headed south before the Portuguese advance, the 'whole land was thrown into fearful agitation... with a shocking famine and terrible robbing and stealing'. People were dying 'in droves.' Starving children, clamouring for food, besieged the mission in Omupanda.¹⁶⁶

The recurrence of scarcity before 1915, and the generalised as opposed to localised famine of that year, go far to explain the enormity of the 'famine that swept.' But to this must be added the effects of war and violence from mid-1915.¹⁶⁷ The Kwanyama central grain stores had been abandoned in Ondjiva.¹⁶⁸ In Ombandja, the Portuguese had confiscated millet stores and cattle during re-occupation.¹⁶⁹ Additionally, Kwanyama mortality through actual combat reduced household male labour for survival purposes such as cattle-herding and migrant labour.

¹⁶⁴ NAN A 233, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 2, p 83.

¹⁶⁵ Biblioteca da Sociedade de Geografia de Lisboa, SGL:98-A-27, Carlos Mittelberger, Poesia Pastoral do Cuanhama. Litteratura Oral Bantu, n.d.

¹⁶⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33.

¹⁶⁷ BG 28 1915-17, p 188.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 104).

Mandume allegedly refused to distribute grain before expelling the invasion. AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989; interview with Simpson Ndatipo, Nakayale, 3.11.1989; interview with Simeon Heita, Onawa, 20.2.1989.

The name by which the great famine is most commonly remembered, *ondjala yawekomba*, powerfully conveys the sense of movement and violence experienced.¹⁷⁰ As one oral informant explained, 'it was an angry famine that swept people.'¹⁷¹ A large movement of people south occurred from Oukwanyama and Ombandja, including their kings, as a result of military occupation.¹⁷² While the southern parts of Oukwanyama proved better able to absorb this influx, the smaller western Ovambo polities were more fragile and experienced a knock-on effect from violence. Famine intersected with violence here in a particularly complex way. Incoming Mbandja, many of whom arrived in Ombalantu only to expire,¹⁷³ began raiding western people's grain stores and stock.¹⁷⁴ This caused large displacements to the east.¹⁷⁵ Oral informants stress that the greatest proportion of those who died in or on the way to Ondonga were migrants from the west.¹⁷⁶ These movements exacerbated scarcity in areas to which the desperate migrated. The attraction of Ondonga for famine sufferers elsewhere was their successful melon harvest. Melon pips were ground and cooked, constituting an important famine food.¹⁷⁷ Rautanen argued that the Ndonga would not have experienced famine, had not other groups inundated the area.¹⁷⁸

De Waal argues that famine names which connote mass movement of people ('Wandering' or 'mass strangerhood') are usually given to famines which bring destitution in a more serious way, as well as hunger. These are

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Jeremia Benjamin, Oshigambo, 2.10.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 152-3).

¹⁷¹ Interview with Petrus Ndongo, Odibo, 23.11.1989.

¹⁷² NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Extracts RC's Personal Diary, 17.3.1917; interview with Olavi Twamoneni, Okalongo, 29.12.1989.

¹⁷³ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Olavi Twamoneni, Okalongo, 29.12.1989.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with Sandell Michael, Omaalala, 2.11.1989.

¹⁷⁷ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health Conditions, 31.12.1915. Interview with Andreas Uukule, Onyaanya, 22.11.1989.

¹⁷⁸ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

often 'famines that kill.'¹⁷⁹ The *ondjala yawekomba* falls into this category. Implicit in all famines is the suspension of a functioning social order;¹⁸⁰ in extreme famine there are greater gradations of social breakdown.

The laws of hospitality towards strangers broke down. This emerged vividly when the refugee Mbandja group under King Vaifeni of Onaluheke headed towards Uukwaluudhi. The drama unfolded in legal complaints filed later against the Kwaluudhi king, Mwala. His people attacked and robbed Vaifeni's father, Hunduka, after Mwala had accepted gifts and invited the Mbandja to settle. 'The Ombandja chief MONGELA, on hearing that his father had been attacked committed suicide.'¹⁸¹ In the trauma of dearth, expropriation, violence and 'wandering', Vaifeni's suicide is not easily categorised as egoistic, anomic or heroic, in the Durkheimian sense.¹⁸² Evidence is scanty, but deeply suggestive of the crisis of the kingship's place in ideology and the broader religious imagination.¹⁸³

The famine has another name: *ondjala yavombandja*, the famine of the Mbandja. To prevent the Mbandja coming into their homesteads to seize their food, the Ndonga put thorn branches against their entrances. Oral history relates how the Mbandja died in great numbers on these thorn branches.¹⁸⁴ Normative relations between groups were eroded in other ways. Migrating women from the endogamous Mbandja married into different communities in western and central Ovamboland as a famine survival strategy.¹⁸⁵ Increased

¹⁷⁹ Alexander de Waal, *Famine That Kills. Darfur, Sudan, 1984-1985* (Oxford, 1989), pp 74-5.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p 74.

¹⁸¹ RCO 3/1916/4, RC - Missionary Alho, 10.7.1917. The oral version collected in 1989 is almost identical; interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 195).

¹⁸² Emile Durkheim, *Suicide. A Study in Sociology* (London, 1952), pp 217 and 258.

¹⁸³ Evidence from Evale, seat of the greatest rain-making kings, is even more scanty at this stage.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Andreas Uukule, Onyaanya, 22.11.1989; interview with Konis Imene and Aune Shaningwa, Onampadhi, 4.11.1989.

¹⁸⁵ Interview with Heikia Amweele, Okaku, 6.3.1990. The informant related how these women later sought out their families and re-established links with them after the famine.

inter-marriage may have occurred amongst other migrant women. *Efundula* was indefinitely postponed in Oukwanyama.¹⁸⁶

Reciprocal assistance mechanisms within close kin groups also broke down. An Ndonga oral informant recalled that kin were 'chased away' if they came for food.¹⁸⁷ Famine songs expressed the breakdown of compassion, where mothers heard their children cry for food but thought only of their own hunger.¹⁸⁸ There are many references to the abandonment of children¹⁸⁹ and several to infanticide.¹⁹⁰ Rautanen impressed on Pritchard in August 1915 that 'the women were killing their infants owing to their inability to find food for them or for themselves.'¹⁹¹ The fact that infanticide was reported in less famine-affected Ondonga suggests that it occurred widely. Instances of cannibalism were also recalled.¹⁹²

Movement southwards was inspired by the need to escape such extremity. The shortage of able-bodied men was directly attributable to the large exodus to seek work in Hereroland; men who had left long before famine mortality rose to the dramatic heights where Welsch could say two-thirds of some districts had died of hunger.¹⁹³ The striking aspect of this migration is the fact that many of those on the move southwards were accompanied by women and children. The formation of an Ndonga community in Luderitz Bay, referred to as *okaNdongwena*,¹⁹⁴ shows the resilience of those famine migration survivors. It also indicates that the

¹⁸⁶ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, 30.12.1915.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with Konis Imene and Aune Shaningwa, Onampadhi, 4.11.1989.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Sandell Michael, Omaalala, 2.11.1989.

¹⁸⁹ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915; BG 28 1915-17, pp 189 and 528.

¹⁹⁰ NAN RCO Vol 11, IV, Commandant Otjiwarongo - OC SAMR Grootfontein, 10.9.1915.

¹⁹¹ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 4.

¹⁹² Interview with Konis Imene and Aune Shaningwa, Onampadhi, 4.11.1989; interview with Sandell Michael, Omaalala, 2.11.1989; interview with Petrus Ndongo, Odibo, 23.11.1989.

¹⁹³ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht 30.12.1915.

¹⁹⁴ OkaNdongwena - little Ondonga. Interview with Hans Namuhuya, Oniipa, 18.11.1989.

migration of women with their menfolk in the early days of the great famine was an important factor in establishing permanence and identity in the south.

But the success of southern migration was mixed. Many died on the way.¹⁹⁵ Those who survived and tried returning with purchased foodstuff were frequently victimised on their return journey by desperate new migrants.¹⁹⁶ When monitoring posts were established for migrant labour after South African colonial occupation, it was noted that many migrants to the south had perished in previous months. Food supplies were then arranged for migrant labour.¹⁹⁷ Less is known about the survival of those who migrated north into Portuguese-occupied territory.¹⁹⁸ A greater part of Angola's southernmost regions was already depopulated. Missionaries calculated that of a pre-famine population of 30,000 around Humbe, only 3,000 remained in 1916,¹⁹⁹ mainly due to migration.

The question of famine relief was raised by missionaries with Pritchard in September 1915, arguing the German precedent.²⁰⁰ Arrangements were made to transport maize meal up from the south.²⁰¹ Pritchard made clear the standard British relief policy, which encouraged people to help themselves - the Ovambo would have to buy the relief grain.²⁰² But when food supplies approached the north, deep sands prevented vehicles proceeding beyond Itota, south-east of Ondonga.²⁰³ Few potential Ovambo purchasers could gain access to Itota because ox-wagon transport had become impossible. Apart

¹⁹⁵ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 12.

¹⁹⁶ AVEM c/k 22 No 2, Wulfhorst, 'Haluodi', ca 1915-31.

¹⁹⁷ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC - Waananen, 31.1.1917.

¹⁹⁸ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama-Evale-Mupa, p 205.

¹⁹⁹ BG 28 1915-17, p 530.

²⁰⁰ AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulfhorst, Der Kriegszug, ca 1910-1933; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 4.

²⁰¹ NAN RCO Vol 11, IV, Unregistered Correspondence, Relief Measures, 1915-16.

²⁰² AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulfhorst, Der Kriegszug, ca 1910-1933.

²⁰³ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

from losses through banditry and slaughter for food, surviving cattle were too weak to travel the distance.²⁰⁴

Welsch pointed out in March 1916 that despite improved transport in supplying relief, a sack of maize at one hundred marks was prohibitively expensive, equivalent to one pregnant cow. The richest Ovambo could barely afford this, let alone the poor who had slaughtered their last goats in the previous famine season.²⁰⁵

There is no doubt that people perished in their thousands. Many factors contributed to mortality, most obviously famine-related illnesses. The Finnish Mission hospital at Onandjokwe, though based in Ondonga where famine was less extreme,²⁰⁶ furnished some indications of the health problems arising from scarcity. Selma Rainio, founder and doctor-in-charge at Onandjokwe hospital, noted that during the second and third quarters of 1915 drought-resistant melons and their pips were the main food.²⁰⁷ Milk was scarce. The monotonous diet on famine foods left people generally weak. At the end of 1915, the melon crop in Ondonga was exhausted. As no early rains came, people were left waiting month after month to begin cultivating. At this point many Ndonga died and Rainio herself was perplexed as to how others managed to survive. The hospital by December 1915 was able to feed patients ground maize provided by the administration.²⁰⁸

The two main illnesses which ground down ability to survive were dysentery²⁰⁹ and beri-beri. Dysentery reached epidemic proportions.²¹⁰ The

²⁰⁴ AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulfhorst, Der Kriegszug, ca 1910-1933; NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

²⁰⁵ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

²⁰⁶ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health Conditions, 31.12.1915.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 11.

²⁰⁹ Rainio's report, which was a translation, mentions diarrhoea. Rhenish and Spiritan missionaries refer to dysentery; Rainio was almost certainly treating the same illness. See NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health Conditions, 31.12.1915; AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch -

contagion of stomach ailments in Onandjokwe hospital posed such a threat to newly-admitted patients that the whole 'native' wing was closed down in December 1915 and only out-patients were treated.²¹¹ Beri-beri became particularly prevalent in the months before the 1916 harvest, when Rainio argued the disease was universal to a greater or lesser degree.²¹² The greater part of those who were brought to Onandjokwe hospital diagnosed as 'starving', who left in a satisfactory condition, died later from recurring privation and illness.²¹³

Given the marginal presence of missionaries and officials at the time, no general statistics are available for famine mortality in the whole of Ovamboland. Union officials estimated a mortality of 25,000 for Ovamboland, out of a population believed to number 156,000.²¹⁴ Spiritan missionaries calculated southern Angola suffered 50,000 dead, including the plateau area.²¹⁵ Genié had predicted that one third of the southern Angola population would perish.²¹⁶ Wulforth put Kwanyama mortality at one quarter,²¹⁷ though Welsch argued some localities reached half.²¹⁸ Possibly migration distorted missionary perceptions of mortality rates, as the weaker were left behind.

One hallmark of the great famine was that the Ovambo did not bury those who died from starvation or disease.²¹⁹ Abandoned corpses littered the

Deputation, Quartelbericht, 31.12.1915; BG 28 1915-17, pp 188 and 530; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 11.

²¹⁰ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 31.12.1915; BG 28 1915-17, pp 188 and 530; Tsumeb Museum, Ilse Schatz (ed.), Tsumeb zu OMEGs Zeiten (unpublished manuscript, n.d.).

²¹¹ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 5, Rainio, Health Conditions, 31.12.1915.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 21. These mortality estimates were later considered exaggerated. See NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Manning - Secretary Protectorate, 21.3.1917.

²¹⁵ BG 28 1915-17, p 478.

²¹⁶ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama-Evale-Mupa, p 206.

²¹⁷ AVEM c/k 22 No 9, Wulforth, Der Kriegszug, ca 1910-1933.

²¹⁸ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

²¹⁹ BG 28 1915-17, p 500.

outskirts of the worst-affected settled areas and the migration routes.²²⁰

Missionaries attempted burials, but lack of manpower and the hardness of the dry ground made digging graves very difficult.²²¹

Peaks of mortality appeared to follow the contours of seasons when wild foods disappeared²²² and in the build-up to and experience of the failed harvests of 1914-15 and late 1915. In Evale, for example, hundreds died in late 1915, mostly elderly. The Catholic mission cart had been commandeered by Pereira de Eça's expeditionary force and with porters forbidden to move between districts, resupply from the outside was impossible.²²³ Lack of surface water and grazing severely reduced cattle herds. In March 1916 Welsch reported that 50 to 75 per cent of cattle had died of hunger or been slaughtered.²²⁴ This meant that no milk was available for children. People who passed through Omatemba on the migratory path north usually had their children slung over their shoulders.²²⁵ Clearly, the age groups most affected by mortality were the very young²²⁶ and the very old.²²⁷ Economic stratification also affected mortality.²²⁸

Recovery in 1916 was a difficult process. Late rains fell, though cultivation was hampered by lack of seed and physical weakness.²²⁹ People

²²⁰ AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama-Evale-Mupa, p 206; AGCSSp 485-A-IV, Catholic Missionary Activities in Portuguese West Africa, n.d., p 12.

²²¹ AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33; NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915; AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.12.1915.

²²² BG 28 1915-17, pp 500-1; AGCSSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-1930, Kuanhama-Evale-Mupa, p 206; AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 31.12.1915.

²²³ AGCSSp 476-B-V, Keiling - TRP, 28.7.1915; 477-A-IV, La Guerre Mondiale, p 143; BG 28 1915-17, p 502.

²²⁴ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ BG 28 1915-17, p 528; AVEM c/k 22 No 7, Wulfhorst, Erlebnisse, ca 1910-33; NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Section V, Annex 6, Rautanen, Short Sketch on the Famine in Amboland, 26.12.1915.

²²⁷ BG 28 1915-17, p 488.

²²⁸ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916;

Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 4.

²²⁹ BG 28 1915-17, p 530.

who had fled starvation and Portuguese troops further north had no fields to cultivate. But the situation in Oukwanyama improved from February 1916. Wild fruits and vegetables were gathered intensively and gardens came under cultivation. Animals which had migrated due to earlier aridity were drawn back by improved vegetation, providing an additional source of food. The richness of the marula harvest was of limited nutritional value in Welsch's view, for much of it was used in beer-brewing. 'All the evils of alcohol came to light.'²³⁰ Follow-up rains were late and the young crops were in danger of dessication, but when they finally fell they transformed the tiny gardens into 'a sight for sore eyes.'²³¹

Those who had planted and expected to harvest in Oukwanyama, however, did so with trepidation. Bandit groups mushroomed, drawn to where the millet crop was maturing.²³² Already in March 1916 these bandits were cutting the heads of grain and taking them to their hideouts.²³³ In more extreme cases people had been driven out of their homesteads which were now occupied by bandits, who waited to harvest their crops. There was virtually no protection against such criminality.

Military and political hiatus

South African administration in Ovamboland from 1915 was headed by a Resident Commissioner (RC),²³⁴ Major Manning, seconded from the South African Native Affairs Department.²³⁵ In September 1915 Pritchard had

²³⁰ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Interview with Jeremia Benjamin, Oshigambo, 2.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 152).

²³³ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

²³⁴ NAN RCO 1/1916/1, General Smuts - Chief Secretary Windhoek, 29.9.1915; Chief Secretary Windhoek - Pritchard, 30.9.1915.

²³⁵ NAN RCO 1/1916/1, European Staff Return, 1.2.1918; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, March 1916.

agreed that the Neutral Zone should remain in place and jointly administered until the boundary question could be resolved.²³⁶ Major Fairlie, of the South African Mounted Rifles (SAMR), was Union Government Resident in Namakunde,²³⁷ the joint station shared with a Portuguese Resident in the Neutral Zone. Fairlie's duties included advising Mandume.²³⁸

The difficulties in Oukwanyama were summed up by Fairlie in February 1916:

The PR [Portuguese Representative] seems to think that this country can be brought into a state of full administrative control in a very limited period. He forgets that we have broken the authority of the only person who had any and that we have not yet had time to properly substitute our own.²³⁹

The immediate post-occupation period resembled a hiatus. Fairlie's comment captures the hasty spirit of the Portuguese thrust for definitive occupation and the problem inherent in any power vacuum: groups fighting over the same ground for authority. It was however inaccurate to say Mandume's power had been broken. It had been curtailed. Mandume consistently attempted to roll back colonial authority and reassert his position, not necessarily militarily.

The initial problems of control in Oukwanyama were sharply posed by violent or criminal activities at all levels of society. These were the residues of recent war and ongoing famine,²⁴⁰ but also the fruit of processes of *longue durée*, rooted deeply in historic tensions within the Kwanyama polity.

²³⁶ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 9; see map, Appendix 4.

²³⁷ NAN RCO 1/1916/1, European Staff Return, 1.2.1918; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, March 1916; RCO 10/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 14.5.1916.

²³⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1, Union Government (UG) Rep Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 9.2.1916.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Native Commissioner (NC) Windhoek, 18.12.1915.

Prominent among these activities was banditry, engaged in by both 'masterless men' and *omalenga*, the latter independently and in defiance of the central authority of the king. Welsch, the sole remaining Rhenish missionary, whose station in Omatemba came within the Neutral Zone, reported that the hazy frontier gave haven to bandit groups. They robbed alternate sides and eluded authority. Nightly cattle rustling occurred; cattle-owners risked their lives if they tried to stop the bandits, who slaughtered their beasts and consumed the meat on the spot. 'There's no law now in Oukwanyama,' stated Welsch.²⁴¹

A new phenomenon was 'cattle thieving and raiding, chiefly done by what may be termed "the masterless men", ie those who will not recognise any headman and have no fixed place of abode... as a rule they are men without any property.'²⁴² Bandit *omalenga*, or men with similar resources in arms, horses and followers, could sustain their predatory activities longer than these 'masterless men.' The fact that the more notorious bandits were young headmen was a reminder of generational tensions in Kwanyama society. One petty headman of Mandume headed such a band, empowered by his modern weaponry. He still claimed to 'belong' to Mandume, but also to the Portuguese and to the British, according to expediency.²⁴³

Criminals were differentiated in terms of resources and the ways they organised their lives in areas which lay beyond their dominators' grasp,²⁴⁴ the dominators in this instance being variously king, greater headmen and colonialists. The bandit *omalenga* were 'masters' in their own right, attracting adherents in patron-client networks similar to those developed by Makili in the Kunene ten years earlier. The simultaneous political struggle engaged in

²⁴¹ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, 30.12.1915.

²⁴² NAN RCO 10/1916/1, UG Representative Namakunde - Administrator SWA, 31.12.1915.

²⁴³ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.12.1915.

²⁴⁴ Donald Crummey (ed.), *Banditry, rebellion and social protest in Africa* (London, 1986), p 2.

by the kingship made more space for the self-help initiatives by those Kwanyama with arms who became active on the frontiers of criminality, especially in the Neutral Zone. Welsch had been optimistic of Mandume's ability to check the ravages committed against defenceless homesteads, but the Portuguese, who tended to conflate Mandume with every lawless activity,²⁴⁵ threatened to kill Mandume if he came near Omatemba mission again, following a visit in December 1915.²⁴⁶ Those Kwanyama therefore who brought complaints to the mission had little hope of redress. 'So Mandume also can do nothing to stop the handiwork of the bandits.'²⁴⁷

Outside the Neutral Zone, the first real trouble that brewed on the Union side of the boundary stemmed from Martin ka Dikwa's complaints against Kwanyama cattle rustlers. Martin also objected to what he termed the continued conspiracies and rustling of an Ndonga exile in Oukwanyama, Uwango Uhongo.²⁴⁸ He demanded that Mandume should suppress such activities.

[U]nless Mandume now acts quickly and without shifty excuses, he will be faced with the loss of further prestige and being ignored by other Tribes who like Martin still treat him as a Chief but demand that he should act as one.²⁴⁹

Mandume's absence on a hunting trip delayed a response.²⁵⁰ Matters worsened when a petty Kwanyama headman called Amniera stole the Government mail in January 1916, allegedly in the belief that the messenger

²⁴⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/5, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 4.1.1916.

²⁴⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Fairlie, Report on Mandume, ca 1917.

²⁴⁷ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht 30.3.1916.

²⁴⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 18.1.1917; 1/1916/2, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 5.3.1916.

²⁴⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 18.1.1916.

²⁵⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 28.1.1916.

was a returning migrant worker with a food parcel.²⁵¹ When the messenger insisted the parcel belonged to the English, Amniera is reported to have said:

You must not talk to us of the English. There is war and the English and the Portuguese are one and the same nation. You can tell the English that we are Mandume's foremen and that Mandume is in the veld and sent us to take the goods.²⁵²

There were numerous occasions when criminals employed ideological idioms institutionalised in raiding²⁵³ and benefited from Mandume's centralisation of raiding control in previous years, which gave greater weight to his name. This complicated Mandume's position, which officials were beginning to argue showed 'an evident lack of control or wilful neglect on his part.'²⁵⁴

On 7 February Mandume returned from his hunting trip and Amniera was promptly handed over to Fairlie at Namakunde, with the stolen goods. Uwango Uhongo was sent back to Ondonga.²⁵⁵ Manning professed himself politically satisfied with Mandume's handling of the affair;²⁵⁶ it relieved Fairlie of the need to use the Zone police and set a precedent which might involve the Portuguese.²⁵⁷

The Portuguese themselves would have preferred to remove Mandume completely from power.²⁵⁸ Failing this, they insisted his access to the Neutral Zone be prohibited. Already in January 1916, Manning had recommended the creation of 'a "Buffer State" between the Portuguese and

²⁵¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 7.2.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 4.2.1916; RCO 10/1916/4, Manning - Fairlie, 18.1.1916.

²⁵² NAN RCO 10/1916/5, Sairkairni's statement, 5.1.1916.

²⁵³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 9.2.1916; Intermittent Diary, 17.1.1916.

²⁵⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative, 7.2.1916.

²⁵⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Fairlie, Report on Mandume, ca 1917.

²⁵⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/5, Administrator SWA - RC Ovamboland, 16.3.1916. It was suggested that in a case such as Amniera's, the best solution was to ask the chief to inflict a stipulated number of lashes as corporal punishment.

²⁵⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/5, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 7.1.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 19.5.1916.

²⁵⁸ NAN A 223, William Chapman, Memoirs Vol 2, p 84.

British territory, to which Mandume or his immediate followers have no access.²⁵⁹ The whole boundary question with its Neutral Zone was plagued by lack of permanence and lack of natural markers, such as hills, mountains or rivers. The proposed 'buffer' necessitated

a provisional demarcation line for the southern boundary of the Neutral Zone some 12 kilometres from the northern line already provisionally pointed out to the natives by British and Portuguese representatives.²⁶⁰

The provisionalism of these dispensations compounded the sense of impermanence and confusion. 'Even a surveyor, without all the necessary instruments, could never say where the line was if he went a mile from Namakunde Station.'²⁶¹ *Elites* were particularly frustrated in their movements, but the fact that humbler inhabitants moved across the border much as before acted to draw in the former when problems arose:

When it is expected that these people should make a division among themselves one is reminded of King Cetshwayo's remarks under similar circumstances: 'A cow and its calf will always run to each other unless separated by a fence'. There is no definite 'fence' dividing the Portuguese and Protectorate Ovakuanyama.²⁶²

On numerous recorded occasions, Mandume requested to know the exact location of the boundary.²⁶³ Its undefined character caused 'general

²⁵⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/5, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 4.1.1916.

²⁶⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/5, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 4.1.1916.

²⁶¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916.

²⁶² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 14.5.1916.

²⁶³ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Ovamboland Report 1916, Notes on Col Pritchard's speech to Mandume, Namakunde, 14.11.1915; RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 9.2.1916; Intermittent Diary Neutral Zone, 14.11.1915 and 18.11.1915.

uneasiness';²⁶⁴ it was acknowledged that the cutting-up of the Ovakwanyama country and tribe by a geographical line was unnatural and would always cause minor disturbances. A Border Agent would always be a necessity.²⁶⁵ Moreover, Welsch argued that by the end of 1916 not many Kwanyama would be living on the Portuguese side.²⁶⁶ In mid-1916, after the small but improved harvest, considerable numbers moved south over the border. Portuguese administrative methods were more unpopular than the Union's.²⁶⁷ The latter were sensitive to the political implications of this:

The hatred of the Portuguese is not confined to Mandume but is shared by all the people and whilst it is more than likely he would get a poor following against us, the whole people would be with him if he went against the Portuguese.²⁶⁸

After the issue was raised at Foreign Ministry level,²⁶⁹ the Union Government complied with the Portuguese demand to restrict the Kwanyama king from the Neutral Zone,²⁷⁰ although it was not in the original agreement to which Mandume was a party in September 1915. This surrender to Portuguese demands confirmed Mandume's frequently expressed fears of their encroachment on Kwanyama territory. It also made Union officials appear untrustworthy to Mandume. As Fairlie himself noted, 'it must be remembered that his experiences of white men have not been such as to readily inspire confidence in them.'²⁷¹

²⁶⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Administrator Windhoek, 3.11.1916.

²⁶⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, ca 24.5.1916; NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Extracts RC's diary, 2.12.1916; Manning - Gorges, 18.11.1916.

²⁶⁶ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht 28.6.1916.

²⁶⁷ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, Report Namakunde, 10.1.1917; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 25.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer, 4.1.1917.

²⁶⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

²⁶⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 7.2.1916; Administrator Windhoek - RC Ovamboland, 19.1.1916.

²⁷⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 9.2.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Fairlie, Report on Mandume, ca 1917.

²⁷¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 9.2.16.

The Neutral Zone issue remained problematic. On 17 February Mandume entered the Zone despite instructions not to do so,²⁷² to investigate the case of a young woman detained by the Portuguese interpreter.²⁷³ Mandume convinced Fairlie that he believed the ban on his entry was only for his own safety. Fairlie acknowledged that the point was not made clear in translation. Moreover, he had come to Namakunde very openly. Fairlie persuaded the Portuguese it was not a serious breach.²⁷⁴ At this stage Union officials still believed Mandume had potential as a co-operative chief,²⁷⁵ especially if he could be brought, as Fairlie put it, 'more under my hand.'²⁷⁶ On 1 March, however, Mandume crossed through the Neutral Zone right into 'Portuguese' territory. Rumours of a planned Portuguese raid in one area had caused a gathering of people; Mandume told Fairlie he had intended to bring these people into British territory. The raid did not materialise and Mandume apologised, undertaking not to enter the Zone again.²⁷⁷ Fairlie informed the RC that 'in spite of many vague charges to the contrary, the Chief is making a genuine effort to preserve order.'²⁷⁸

The latter was extremely difficult. Welsch put his finger on the real pulse when he told Fairlie in mid-1916 that it was 'the idea of some of the headmen to break the Chief's power to some extent and so get more into their own hands as Mandume restricts them a good deal.'²⁷⁹ In a typical sequence

²⁷² NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, Schedule A, 18.1.1917.

²⁷³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 21.2.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.3.1916.

²⁷⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 21.2.1916.

²⁷⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 19.5.1916.

²⁷⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 9.2.1916.

²⁷⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 6.3.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, Schedule A, 18.1.1917.

²⁷⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative - RC Ovamboland, 6.3.1916.

²⁷⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

in June 1916, adherents of the Angola-based headman Nandi stole a horse from Moihafa, in British territory. The latter made a retaliatory raid, killing two people and taking captives.²⁸⁰ Mandume told Moihafa that this was the sort of thing that caused him all the trouble he had with us and he allowed the women to return to their werft.²⁸¹ Fairlie urged Mandume to punish Moihafa as a gesture to the Portuguese, but before he could do so Nandi continued the feud with a raid on Moihafa's homestead.²⁸²

The continuing famine and violence in a relative power vacuum embroiled Mandume constantly in disputes.²⁸³ Victims appealed to him, while perpetrators committed crimes in his name.²⁸⁴ Colonial occupation did not destroy his determination to retain central control of judicial processes, but his position was increasingly circumscribed. On 14 March 1916, Manning warned Mandume that the Governor of SWA did not want to 'fight black children.'²⁸⁵ Mandume replied:

All you tell me is what I have heard from Major Fairlie and obeyed. He is my friend and I belong to the British, but perhaps my enemies have accused me as usual or some other complaint has been made... Portuguese Natives have been robbing my people on the western side.²⁸⁶

The greatest sufferers in these months were of course the majority of Kwanyama in their homesteads, struggling to survive the last long months of

²⁸⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/2, UG Representative Namakunde - Officer Commanding Portuguese troops Ondjiva, 16.6.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 17.6.1916.

²⁸¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/2, Notes re Moihafa, ca 1916.

²⁸² NAN RCO 10/1916/2, Notes re Moihafa, ca 1916; Dickman - Manning, 16.6.1916.

²⁸³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Administrator Windhoek - Secretary for Defence Cape Town, 8.3.1916.

²⁸⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 14.5.1916.

²⁸⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Meeting between Major Manning and Major Fairlie and Mandume, 14/3/1916, Report, 15.3.1916.

²⁸⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Meeting between Major Manning and Major Fairlie and Mandume, 14/3/1916, Report, 15.3.1916.

famine.²⁸⁷ The reforming trend of the previous period was relevant here, as was Mandume's curtailment of internal depredations by Kwanyama *omalenga*.

This was the moment when bandits were drawn to homesteads where grain was appearing, even evicting people from their homes in order to harvest the fields themselves. 'The people get no help. If they go to the English, they get beautiful words,' wrote Welsch in the Neutral Zone. The 'Herr Major' was very friendly, but complaints were not properly investigated.²⁸⁸ Many complaints in fact ran up against more abuse from staff in the Union and Portuguese administrations. According to Welsch, the official interpreter in Namakunde, Charlie Emeri, was if anything a bigger robber than the bandits about whom people brought complaints.²⁸⁹ In the course of 1916 both Welsch and Mandume made serious allegations regarding Charlie Emeri's extortion and the misuse of his official position, but no disciplinary action followed.²⁹⁰

If the administrative system was prone to abuse, it was also largely indifferent. Welsch noted the Portuguese enthusiasm to have as many Kwanyama subjects as possible, providing passes stating they were Portuguese subjects. In this way, Welsch argued, every criminal was given protection. If people were robbed and sought help or redress, they were yo-yoed between official posts in Omupanda and Ondjiva repeatedly, receiving a dose of Portuguese bureaucracy that eventually wore them out and sent them home frustrated.²⁹¹

²⁸⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1916.

²⁸⁸ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916. The 'Herr Major' referred to is Fairlie, UG Representative.

²⁸⁹ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

²⁹⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Administrator Windhoek, 15.12.1916; see also RCO 1/1916/18, Memorandum meeting RC Ovamboland and Chief Martin, 21.12.1916; RC Ovamboland - Fairlie, 16.12.1916; Fairlie - RC Ovamboland, 18.12.1916; Fairlie - RC Ovamboland, 5.8.1917; Manalenda's statement to RC Ovamboland, 16.12.1916; RCO 1/1917/20, Sapper Roberts, 1917.

²⁹¹ AVEM c/h 31, Omatemba, Welsch - Deputation, Quartelbericht, 30.3.1916.

The character of Portuguese occupation in the 'Lower Cunene' district was distinct in many ways from that of the Union Government. The Portuguese had garrisons at Ondjiva, Omupanda, and later Omatemba, as well as their official Resident in Namakunde. The reality of these outposts was grim. Malaria and other illnesses killed or laid low a large proportion of soldiery and officials.²⁹² Ongoing financial crises in Lisbon led to the sporadic payment of salaries and persistence of abuses that reforming officials like de Matos had criticised,²⁹³ especially 'freebooting expeditions' by black soldiery²⁹⁴ with the backing of some white officers. For example, in July 1916 four 'police boys', investigating complaints against a Neutral Zone *elenga* Hamukoto²⁹⁵ were repulsed from his homestead by a 'gang' in Portuguese uniforms. The gang leader was Kapitiya Amutenya, an Mbandja auxiliary with Pereira de Eça's expedition in 1915,²⁹⁶ dismissed from service for cattle theft and dishonesty.²⁹⁷ He had established an illegal meat trading network and the gang commandeered grain in the Neutral Zone,²⁹⁸ apparently with the complicity of several Portuguese officers.²⁹⁹

Union officials held that the position of their Portuguese counterparts compared very unfavourably with their own, their sphere of influence not

²⁹² NAN RCO 10/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916; RCO 10/1916/2, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 17.6.1916.

²⁹³ AHU 1R 2S P22, Norton de Matos - Ministro, 6.3.1915; NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 5.6.1916.

²⁹⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1916; RCO 9/1919, Dickman - Manning, 21.3.1921; NAN A 450, C.H.L. Hahn Papers Vol 23, Intelligence Diary Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 1.1.1917.

²⁹⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/3, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 10.7.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 14.7.1916.

²⁹⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/3, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, Shihama'a statement, 10.7.1916.

²⁹⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Acting UG Representative Namakunde, 13.7.1916.

²⁹⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/3, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 10.7.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 14.7.1916.

²⁹⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/3, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 10.7.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 14.7.1916; Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 19.7.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 5.6.1916. Welsch had reached the same conclusion as Hahn: RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

extending beyond their garrisons at Ondjiva and Omatemba. The Portuguese were not able to move about without a strong escort, unlike Union officials. Portuguese interactions with local women were seen as a contributing factor. 'It is supposed and reasonably so that the behaviour of the Portuguese towards Native women has much to do with the respect in which they are held.'³⁰⁰ Portuguese construction of collaborative structures³⁰¹ led to abuses: 'the men (Natives) they appoint as headmen use the authority given them for their own benefit and in the end cause much trouble.'³⁰² The smaller headmen who remained in place after the Kwanyama defeat in 1915 stayed loyal to Mandume³⁰³ and constituted an important intelligence network. 'Mandume is in full possession of all information as to their [Portuguese] strength and movements.'³⁰⁴

Despite this superiority of tone in Union officials' opinions of Portuguese rule, important similarities with their own administration existed. Taxation and labour exactions on the Angolan side were not replicated, it was true, nor was the same level of militarisation and force employed.³⁰⁵ The system of labour migration which Union officials had begun to establish was more sophisticated, arising predominantly from the demands of a small capitalist mining and industrial base. Their authoritarianism worked in subtler ways. But Union structures also had their African agents and

³⁰⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916. One South African official had a relationship, and a child, with an Ndonga woman; this earned him his transfer out of Ovamboland. See NAN RCO 1/1916/11, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 14.11.1916.

³⁰¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1916.

³⁰² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

³⁰³ Not all smaller headmen did so; some sought refuge in Ondonga from an early date. NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 4.10.1916.

³⁰⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie, Memorandum on information furnished by Missionary Welsch, Omatemba, ca 1916.

³⁰⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916; RCO 9/1919, Dickman - Manning, 21.3.1921.

surrogates who committed abuses; nor were Union personnel innocent of sexual relations with local women.³⁰⁶ Finally, their threshold of tolerance with leaders from pre-occupation days was not high, as Mandume's history would illustrate.

The next charge levelled against Mandume in 1916³⁰⁷ was the killing of a headman in Portuguese territory, an act which he freely admitted.³⁰⁸ Mandume reported that a headman in a former tributary Kwangali sub-group in Angola usurped a cattle post south of the border³⁰⁹ and Fairlie agreed that Mandume should remove him.³¹⁰ The headman, Mapangasha, allegedly fled back across the border with the cattle. Mandume pursued him with some seventy followers, killed Mapangasha in self-defence and returned with the cattle.³¹¹ The Portuguese accused Mandume of travelling 120 miles into Angola with 800 fighters and killing a large number of people.³¹² Manning suspected the local Portuguese Representative D'Aguiar of trying to boost his own career with these inflated claims.³¹³ But plainly Mandume had entered forbidden territory yet again.

The difficulties of this hiatus period were located within local and frontier politics of unique dimensions. However, the further Union officials were from the intricacies of the situation and from the hamstrung Kwanyama

³⁰⁶ NAN RCO 1/1916/11, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 14.11.1918.

³⁰⁷ In April, Mandume was accused of ordering the killing of the *elenga* Kashali, allegedly for pro-British sentiments. It was recorded, but no action taken. NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 25.7.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 29.7.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.1.1917.

³⁰⁸ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, Schedule A, 18.1.1917.

³⁰⁹ This was later doubted. NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1. Manning - Fairlie, 3.6.1916; Information furnished by headman Festus to RC Ovamboland, 12.6.1916.

³¹⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde, Notes re Mandume, 29.4.1916.

³¹¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 10.5.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Fairlie, Report on Mandume, ca 1917.

³¹² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 5.5.1916.

³¹³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland, Private notes for discussion with Major Fairlie, 6.5.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1916.

king whose subjects were enduring the tail end of famine, the less sympathetic they were. In May, after the Mapangasha affair, General Botha himself became involved. He advised that Mandume should travel to Windhoek to explain his conduct before the Administrator, Gorges. No coercion was to be used.³¹⁴ Officials later castigated Mandume for failing 'to put himself right with the Government,'³¹⁵ but it was revealing that local officials acknowledged his initial willingness³¹⁶ to do so. Kwanyama headmen prevented Mandume from travelling to Windhoek: Ovambo law prohibited any king from leaving his own territory.³¹⁷

This refusal was the turning point in the South African administration's decision to dispose of Mandume.³¹⁸ He had become synonymous with the 'Angola border troubles.' '[T]he fact that this unruly chief must be removed, has been more and more obvious.'³¹⁹ The disillusionment had become mutual. Mandume extended his disaffection to perceived allies of colonialism and referred to the Ndonga king as 'the English Government's man.'³²⁰

On 23 June 1916 the Union Representative in Namakunde reached agreement with his Portuguese counterpart over military co-operation and

³¹⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Administrator Windhoek - RC Ovamboland, 25.5.1916; Fairlie - Officer Commanding Portuguese troops Ondjiva, 29.5.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 2.6.1916.

³¹⁵ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate SA, 18.1.1917.

³¹⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916.

³¹⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 31.5.1916; M.J. de Jager in Union of South Africa, *Report on the Conduct of the Ovakuanyama Chief Mandume, and on the Military Operations Conducted against him in Ovamboland* (Cape Town, 1917), p 2. Manning had recognised Martin ka Dikwa's similar difficulty when, despite his own willingness to proceed to Tsumeb outside Ondonga proper to testify in cases of cattle theft, he was not permitted to do so by his headmen. NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 31.5.1916.

³¹⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Bourne Pretoria - Administrator Windhoek, 22.6.1916.

³¹⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Administrator Windhoek, 2.6.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, Schedule A, 18.1.1917.

³²⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 8.6.1916.

exchange of information regarding troop movements. Manning later informed the Portuguese that no forcible measures could be taken until December, when water was available.³²¹ A shift in tempo occurred in July, when Hahn replaced Fairlie in Namakunde for a short spell of sick leave.³²² Close administrative observation became intelligence-gathering for military purposes.³²³ Hahn banked on dividing Mandume's support and set about pulling asunder the remaining loyalties of the headmen to the kingship.

The Portuguese had requested Welsch's removal in May. Expulsion was delayed until August, when the Administrator visited Ovamboland and met the Portuguese Resident in Namakunde. The last missionary left Oukwanyama³²⁴ and Portuguese troops occupied the mission.³²⁵

Mandume was acutely sensitive to these shifts. Reports reached South African officials in September that the senior headman Kalola had been obliged to prevent Mandume firstly from taking flight and then from killing himself, in the belief that both the South Africans and the Portuguese were surrounding him. He had vowed to make a stand in the vicinity of his present residence, if pushed to extremity.³²⁶ Then Mandume made an extraordinary appearance alone near Namakunde station on 16 September. Mandume stated to Fairlie his belief that Portuguese troops were about to attack him at his

³²¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 23.6.1916.

³²² NAN RCO 1/1916/2, Fairlie - RC Ovamboland, 21.5.1917; RC - Secretary Protectorate, 29.6.1916.

³²³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 31.7.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 23.8.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1917.

³²⁴ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.1.1917. South African officials accused Welsch of 'interference'; the Portuguese accused him of adding to their difficulties with Mandume. RCO Vol 9 File 9 9/1916, Points discussed HH Administrator SWA and Portuguese Commandant, Namakunde, 10.8.1916.

³²⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 23.8.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - Officer Commanding Military District Cunene, 17.8.1916.

³²⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 25.9.1916; Jan Vennel statement, 8.9.1916.

residence and he feared for his life.³²⁷ Fairlie advised him to return to Ehole, dismissing his fears. He warned him not to enter Angola and stated that Mandume was wrong to have entered the Neutral Zone. Mandume argued that he had only come for protection; his escort comprised only six men. Fairlie conceded in his report of the incident that there was much truth in all the local accusations against the Portuguese.³²⁸

On 25 September discussions were held in Windhoek regarding Mandume, which rejected joint military action with the Portuguese.³²⁹ The question of water supply dictated the timing of any substantial military expedition from the south; until then a small garrison to reinforce Namakunde was despatched.³³⁰ Fairlie notified Mandume.³³¹ This probably prompted Mandume's visit on 8 October to Namakunde station, with close on two hundred armed followers, in violation of the prohibition on the Neutral Zone.³³² Mandume described the group as a hunting party; they made a great deal of noise, though in approaching the Residency only fifty escorted him.³³³ Fairlie, his staff ('We can only die once, if it is time, it is,' quoth Charlie Emeri)³³⁴ and the local Portuguese officials believed their end was near. 'The man had damned impertinence to come here to try and put the wind up us I

³²⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 17.9.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - Officer Commanding Territory Cunene, 16.9.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, Schedule A, 18.1.1917.

³²⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 17.9.1916.

³²⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 25.9.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 25.10.1916.

³³⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 25.9.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Moroney, 6.10.1916.

³³¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 15.10.1916.

³³² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - Ovamboland RC, 11.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 15.10.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.1.1917.

³³³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 11.10.1916.

³³⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Extract Notes Fairlie - RC Ovamboland, 8.10.1916.

believe,' Fairlie fumed to the RC.³³⁵ But it remained a display. In a later comment Manning summed up Mandume's policy:

unless Mandume acts in what he considers a mere defence of his own rights and ambitions he'll do nothing aggressive insofar as we're concerned but will carry out his old ideas for recovery of prestige north of the border.³³⁶

After the garrison arrived on 13 October, Fairlie was instructed to remain strictly on the defensive.³³⁷

As predicted, confrontation with the Portuguese was not long in coming. On 24 October Mandume entered Portuguese territory to reach the residence of Hiwhema, a headman. Again, he argued it was to shift to the south people who had gathered there in anticipation of a Portuguese raid.³³⁸ On arrival, Mandume clashed with a forty-strong Portuguese cavalry detachment, killing one soldier.³³⁹ Fairlie had sent two messages to Mandume to withdraw from Portuguese territory,³⁴⁰ but Mandume gathered reinforcements and returned to Hiwhema's residence on 27 October, allegedly with nearly a thousand men.³⁴¹ Fairlie stated that he had no further control or influence over Mandume.³⁴²

³³⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Fairlie - RC Ovamboland, 8.10.1916.

³³⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 27.10.1916.

³³⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 27.10.1916.

³³⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 11.10.1916.

³³⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 24.10.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Portuguese Representative - UG Representative Namakunde, 8.11.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate SA, 18.1.1917.

³⁴⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 24.10.1916.

³⁴¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 26.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 27.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 28.10.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 27.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 27.10.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 30.10.1916.

³⁴² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Fairlie, Report on Mandume, ca 1917.

Conflict escalated on 30 October. An armed party of Portuguese entered the Neutral Zone. When they 'inadvertently' neared Mandume's residence, they met with a fierce attack. Nineteen white soldiers including their commanding officer were killed.³⁴³ Arms and ammunition were captured.³⁴⁴ Union officials could not immediately assess how far Mandume had plotted this ambush, if at all.³⁴⁵ The Portuguese fell back on Namakunde, where they had a hundred troops with three maxims.³⁴⁶ Manning telegraphed Windhoek that 'Mandume's success and capture of ammunition tends to unite his people on both sides of the border and creates a dangerous position.' There was no question now of Mandume surrendering peacefully. The situation of a few months before, when a Union force of fifty was considered sufficient to depose him, no longer applied.³⁴⁷

Politics, pressure and populism

A very detailed reconstruction of Mandume's last few months can be drawn from intelligence reports. These reveal the minutiae of interactions between officials, Mandume and Kwanyama headmen.³⁴⁸ Before examining these, however, the crisis of the kingship needs to be located in underlying

³⁴³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 6.12.1916; Fairlie - RC Ovamboland, 11.1.1916; RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate SA, 18.1.1917.

³⁴⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, n.d.; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Administrator Windhoek, 3.11.1916; RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 4.1.1917. The arms included two maxims and their ammunition.

³⁴⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Fairlie - British Vice Consul Mossamedes, 30.10.1916.

³⁴⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Administrator Windhoek, 31.10.1916.

³⁴⁷ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 29.12.1916; Portuguese Representative - UG Rep, 8.11.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 5.11.1916.

³⁴⁸ See especially NAN A 450, C.H.L. Hahn papers, Vol 23, Intelligence Diary Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 16.11.1916 - 30.1.1917.

internal processes which could be named but not contextualised in colonial discourse.

Political tension between king and headmen had long been at the heart of the Kwanyama state. In 1915 and 1916 Mandume saw his authority completely undercut and faced removal or elimination, if he overstepped the confines prescribed by South Africa and Portugal. But at the same time, it was constantly necessary for the kingship to mobilise support from *omalenga* and their subjects.³⁴⁹ Extra impetus to do so at this time came from the need to consolidate and reconstruct social relations after the famine, always a striking feature of post-famine recovery in Ovamboland. The re-assertion of central control in Mandume's case involved aggression against headmen, if necessary, and populism. In a sense it paralleled his tactics during the internal reform period. The increasing prominence of his threats to commit suicide should be seen within this framework.

'Mandume expressed the firm intention of committing suicide rather than being captured alive by anybody,' stated one intelligence source.³⁵⁰ Mention of the Portuguese in particular provoked the suicide declaration, as Manning noted in July 1916. 'Mandume... is said to have openly stated he would shoot himself rather than get into their power.'³⁵¹ In a strong sense it was linked to standing ground, remaining in a chosen place. In a message to Martin ka Dikwa in November 1916, Mandume stated he would 'die with his people if necessary.'³⁵² According to the Kaulinge tradition, he told the South Africans: 'I had left Ondjiva and... I will make no more concession to move

³⁴⁹ NAN RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland and Hahn memorandum, ca 1916-17.

³⁵⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Jan Vennel statement, 8.9.1916.

³⁵¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 3.7.1916; RCO 9/1916, Memorandum Ovamboland at date of Administrator's visit, 8.8.1916; RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary SWA, 14.5.1916; RC Ovamboland, Private notes for discussion with Major Fairlie, 6.5.1916.

³⁵² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary SWA, 3.11.1916; Fairlie, Notes on Mandume, ca 1917.

out from my present *embala*. I prefer to die here.³⁵³ He told Hahn early in December:

I cannot go to Windhuk as I have too much to leave behind. If the English want me, I am here and they can come and fetch me here. I will not fire the first shot but I am not a steinbok of the veldt, I am a man, not a woman and I will fight till my last bullet is expended. I am ready here!³⁵⁴

Reference to his suicide was not just a question of courage, which Mandume never lacked. It tapped into a deep ideological vein surrounding the kingship. The notions of honour, of holding ground and remaining 'spiritually' inviolate which have been articulated in modern Kwanyama discourse, and which are associated with militarised societies, may have been present. If true, it would necessarily have been superficial in view of the late and incomplete development of a militarised society in Oukwanyama. But Mandume's recourse to suicide went to a deeper layer, to more ancient conceptions of the king's oneness with the land.

In a time of disorder and fragmentation, the threat of royal suicide was in a sense a response to the trauma of famine, violence and the dissection of Oukwanyama. It was a means of keeping the world intact. The argument makes sense given Mandume's earlier populism; again it was an ideological and religious resource with a stronger populist than *élitist* appeal. How far it would win the support of individual *omalenga* was dubious. This is borne out by the fact that as the crisis unravelled, he put great pressure on his headmen and frequently threatened force.³⁵⁵ These threats of force had only limited impact, especially when a shrewd and resourceful colonial enemy was tugging equally hard at *omalenga* loyalties. Promises of land and increased authority in Oukwanyama were offered in exchange for loyalty to the colonial

³⁵³ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 77-8).

³⁵⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 6.12.1916.

³⁵⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 11.10.1916.

administration.³⁵⁶ Sylvester argues there were geographical patterns to *omalenga* allegiance. Loyal headmen tended to be those close to the Angolan border or his residence, the latter because they came under greater pressure from Mandume. Headmen closer to Namakunde and official presence leaned more towards the Union officials.³⁵⁷ There is some justice in this argument, but there were a number of important exceptions, showing the politics of individual headmen had more weight than proximity to or distance from Mandume.

South African intelligence picked up that some headmen refused to send reinforcements to Mandume during the Hiwhema affair.³⁵⁸ The crises with the Portuguese had further polarized *omalenga* support. Several applied for protection from King Martin and the administration in Ondonga.³⁵⁹ Hahn, now officially Intelligence Officer for the Expedition, was single-mindedly seeking weak links in support for Mandume in order to prise it away from the king.³⁶⁰ Hahn built up lists of pro- and anti-Union headmen and fence-sitters, which were comprehensive though never totally accurate.³⁶¹

Hahn's intelligence diary, beginning in November 1916, focused first on Sheetekela, who was responsible for Mandume's ammunition wagon.

³⁵⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Administrator SWA, 10.11.1916; UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 31.10.1916.

³⁵⁷ Jeremy Sylvester, 'Resistance in Northern Namibia' (unpublished paper, SOAS, University of London, 1991).

³⁵⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 26.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 27.10.1916.

³⁵⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 4.10.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, Fairlie, Intelligence Report No 1, n.d.; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 31.10.1916; RC Ovamboland - Administrator SWA, 10.11.1916.

³⁶⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Telegram RC Ovamboland - Administrator SWA, 15.11.1916.

³⁶¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Manning, Approximate list of majority of Ovakuanyama Headmen of Chief Mandume's tribe, ca 1916; Extracts RC Ovamboland's Diary, 4.12.1916; RCO 15/1916/1, Diary RC Ovamboland, 2.2.1917; RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 4.1.1917. Mandume's mother was not excluded from the equation; officials had grasped that royal succession was matrilineal, and sounded out Ndapona. They concluded she did not influence Mandume as much as the queen mother in Ondonga influenced Martin ka Dikwa, and paid her less attention. NAN RCO Vol 9, File 9, RC Ovamboland Explanatory Notes, July 1916.

Hahn believed the ex-Mbandja king would leave Mandume when opportunity arose and hand over the wagon to officials.³⁶² Sheetekela however was an extremely skilled survivor and Manning suspected him of playing a 'very shady game' with his British pass.³⁶³ Kamburu was a more hopeful case; Hahn doubted he would obey Mandume's order to mobilise his followers.³⁶⁴ Then in late December a senior headman, Ashiana, was ordered to remove from his residence by Mandume, reportedly because he 'favoured the English.'³⁶⁵ He sought refuge in Ondonga.³⁶⁶

On 5 December 1915, a last bid to ascertain both the possibility of Mandume's surrender and his military preparedness was made by Hahn, who was escorted to Ehole by the pro-Union headman Jikuma.³⁶⁷ Mandume made clear there was no question of surrender.³⁶⁸ Hahn also noted his easy command over his fighters and all the signs that the Kwanyama had recovered from the famine.³⁶⁹ Good rains had fallen in November and the crops had started, offering excellent fighting cover.³⁷⁰ For months in fact Manning had recognised that the 'moral effect' of the defeat at Omongwa had disappeared.³⁷¹

Later in December, at a large gathering and beer drink at the *elenga* Kamburu's residence, internal politics and pressures emerged in vivid detail. Contrary to Hahn's forecast this *elenga* had moved closer to Mandume, who attended the function. *Omalenga* such as Kalola, Aufiku and Dishishi were

³⁶² NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 6.12.1916.

³⁶³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 12.1.1917.

³⁶⁴ NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 21.12.1916.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.12.1916.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.1.1917.

³⁶⁷ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 77-8). Official documents spell his name as Jikuma; in the transcription of Kaulinge's interview it has been spelt Ndjukuma.

³⁶⁸ See also Farson, *Behind God's Back*, pp 78-9.

³⁶⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 6.12.1916.

³⁷⁰ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Extracts diary RC Ovamboland, 27.11.1916 and 29.11.1916.

³⁷¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary SWA, 31.5.1916.

prominent; Noyoma and Ashiana were notably absent.³⁷² Mandume suggested to his close headmen gathered there that they should kill Geneketshe, Ashiana and Hyimbili. The response was unenthusiastic, Kalola stressing it would provoke the British. 'We have let the English into our country and were they not here we should not be here.'³⁷³ Mandume made a public proclamation of friendship with the British and hatred for the Portuguese.³⁷⁴ This, together with his recent calling back of Ashiana by using conciliatory messages, was suspected by Manning to be just 'Mandume's smart policy.'³⁷⁵ Certainly Mandume must have been aware spies would be present on such an occasion.

Fairlie expressed uncertainty as to the reliability of those headmen who had supposedly been won over from Mandume and might 'turn on us at an opportune moment.'³⁷⁶ This was potentially embarrassing as most were living west of the road between Namakunde and Ondangwa, which was where any proposed expedition would pass.³⁷⁷ He recommended that even Martin ka Dikwa be treated with suspicion.³⁷⁸ Confidence was further shaken when Mandume was given a friendly reception by ostensibly pro-Union headmen in that part of Oukwanyama near Uukwambi, which was being mooted as an alternative route for the military expedition to the Ondangwa-Namakunde track.³⁷⁹

³⁷² NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 3.1.1917.

³⁷³ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 24.12.1916; Fairlie Intelligence Report No 7, 26.12.1916.

³⁷⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 28.12.1916.

³⁷⁵ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 28.12.1916; A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 3.1.1917.

³⁷⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 26.12.1916.

³⁷⁷ NAN RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland and Hahn Memorandum, ca 1916.

³⁷⁸ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 26.12.1916.

³⁷⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 1.1.1917.

On 29 December Fairlie wrote to the Portuguese Commandant of Lower Kunene informing him that the expeditionary force would arrive at the earliest moment now that sufficient rains had fallen. He notified him that the Government did not wish Portuguese forces to enter the Protectorate and requested they prepare for the eventuality that Mandume might escape into Portuguese territory. The Portuguese Commandant was also cautioned not to leak Union plans to their troops, who might then pass it on to Mandume's spies.³⁸⁰ Tension had risen to such a state now that the roads between Ondonga and Oukwanyama were considered risky for any Union personnel. Mandume had a screen of scouts thrown out in different parts to warn him of the arrival of any troops, especially on the eastern fringe between Oukwanyama and Ondonga.³⁸¹

Other Ovambo kings were crucial to Union military considerations.³⁸² The dynamics of Kwanyama relations with these polities and their regional hegemony before 1915 arguably gave cause for their kings to wish Mandume's power broken, though caution in all dealings with colonialism may have been the main motivation. As with Kwanyama headmen, sympathy with Mandume became more difficult the more vocal and threatening he became in his resistance to colonial pressure.

King Martin kaDikwa of Ondonga played the most active role, especially in informing Hahn, Fairlie and Manning of Mandume's activities and state of mind. He was critical of the aggressive close councillors Mandume chose; he was 'a man who moved in darkness as he flouted older and serious councillors and surrounded himself with young bloods or irresponsible headmen.'³⁸³ He suggested that Mandume was probably getting

³⁸⁰ NAN RCO 15/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 28.12.1916.

³⁸¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Extract Diary RC Ovamboland, 26.1.1917; A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 3.1.1917 and 22.1.1917.

³⁸² They also did reconnaissance on possible support for him in the Kavango region. See NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, Brownlee - Manning, 16.9.1916.

³⁸³ NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 4.1.1917.

assistance from the Germans,³⁸⁴ who might help him if defeated.³⁸⁵ Mandume was known to have connections with German smugglers from whom he tried to purchase arms and horses, as well as German traders in Tsumeb.³⁸⁶ Martin also speculated that Mandume might escape to Evale and unite with the rebel Mwatilefu, who had a considerable following.³⁸⁷

In an interview with Manning on 1 January Martin agreed to provide Ndonga guides for the expedition and to expel any Kwanyama incursion into Ondonga.³⁸⁸ He offered to co-operate in every way provided the government supported him, now that he had committed himself to them openly.³⁸⁹ The Ndonga king insisted that in order to obtain lasting peace, the troops should take severe measures and burn the homesteads of Mandume's adherents.³⁹⁰ Ipumbu in Uukwambi was also approached in early January 1917 and notified of Union intentions towards Mandume. Ipumbu agreed not to allow Mandume to take refuge in Uukwambi.³⁹¹ These overtures were repeated in Ongandjera.³⁹²

³⁸⁴ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.1.1917; RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - troops c/o Magistrate Otjiwarongo, 29.12.1916.

³⁸⁵ Two Germans thought to be Mandume's advisers, Plannett and Westermann, were arrested by the Portuguese in Kavango and taken to Luanda by January. NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, Extract Diary RC Ovamboland, 26.1.1917.

³⁸⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Administrator SWA, 1.12.1916; Statement to RC Ovamboland by Angura Kangundu, 17.2.1917; RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.2.1917; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 25.12.1916; Extract Diary RC Ovamboland, 1.12.1915 and 2.12.1915; Fairlie Intelligence Report No 3, 22.11.1916; NAN RCO 8/1916/2, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 25.1.1917; NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 31.12.1916, 4.1.1917 and 14.1.1917.

³⁸⁷ NAN A450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 31.12.1916 and 3.1.1917. For Mwatilefu's activities see NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary SWA, 30.7.1916.

³⁸⁸ NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 1.1.1917.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.1.1917; RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 1.2.1917.

³⁹⁰ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.1.1917; NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 21.1.1917 and 22.1.1917.

³⁹¹ NAN RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 1.2.1917; NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 11.1.1917.

³⁹² NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 15.1.1917.

Officials sought firm commitment from pro-Union Kwanyama headmen and instructed them to report to Namakunde. Only Noyoma appeared. Kamburu and Jikuma had been summoned by Mandume to 'work in his fields.' Kamburu had obeyed, but Jikuma was warned on his approach that he was in danger and turned back.³⁹³ He and Ashiana pleaded that Martin should speak on their behalf to the administration. They could not visit officials because Mandume would raid their cattle, but would come forward once troops arrived.³⁹⁴

Mandume himself was restless and anxious;³⁹⁵ cattle were brought closer to Ehole³⁹⁶ and intensified scouting was reported from Martin's eastern cattle post. On 18 January he cancelled a hunting trip after hearing of Portuguese military preparations at Ondjiva.³⁹⁷ By this time Jikuma's life was in danger: he had disobeyed many of Mandume's summonses to go to Ehole and been warned that Mandume was calling him 'one of the English'.³⁹⁸ Mandume was now believed to have mobilised extensively, intending to make a determined stand at his residence. He had over one hundred horses, while many families and cattle were gathered north-east of Ehole. The young headmen and 'bloods' in particular declared they would fight to the last.³⁹⁹ Many people were now joining Mandume, largely through fear as officials saw it.⁴⁰⁰ He was threatening to disperse the big headmen such as Noyoma,⁴⁰¹ Jikuma and Ashiana.⁴⁰² Through the rest of January, as the troops

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 19.1.1917.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.1.1917.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.1.1917.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.1.1917.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.1.1917.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ NAN RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland and Hahn Memorandum, ca 1916; NAN RCO 1/1916/1 v 2, Hahn, Intelligence Report, 1.12.1916; NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 4.1.1917 and 21.1.1917.

⁴⁰¹ Mandume briefly took Noyoma captive, but the latter escaped. NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 30.1.1917.

⁴⁰² NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 22.1.1917. A brief quarrel flared between Sheetekela and Mandume over the former's mistreatment of women under his care, but it subsided and he remained in charge of the ammunition wagon. NAN

approached, the numbers reported under Mandume's command fluctuated.⁴⁰³ By late January, the Union expeditionary force had arrived in Ondonga.

Standing his ground: the death of Mandume

The Military Expedition of over 270 troops left Ondangwa for Namakunde on 2 February. That night Mandume mobilised *omalenga* and fighters near the Ondonga border.⁴⁰⁴ Kalola engaged briefly with the force on 3 February, but as de Jager was informed that Mandume was not with Kalola but at Ehole,⁴⁰⁵ he pushed on to Namakunde though a running fight continued for about thirty minutes. The column lost two horses and killed and wounded about twelve of Kalola's men.⁴⁰⁶ The expedition camped seven miles from Namakunde. The next day it crossed expanses of mud and floodwater to reach Namakunde, whose garrison had been virtually cut off for the last three months. On 5 February it was decided to attack Ehole the next day.⁴⁰⁷

De Jager knew that Mandume expected him to come straight to Ehole from Namakunde and had posted Kalola with between 600 and 900 men to block their advance at Hidowa's residence, where Mandume had earlier routed the Portuguese. Mandume himself was reported to have a bodyguard at Ehole of between 200 and 300 well-armed men, and was likely to advance once Kalola engaged de Jager's force. De Jager's objective was to attack Ehole without engaging Kalola.⁴⁰⁸ The column therefore detoured to avoid this and

A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 22.1.1917; NAN RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 4.1.1917.

⁴⁰³ NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 22.1.1917 and 28.1.1917.

⁴⁰⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1917.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.* These same sources claimed Kalola's action had been against Mandume's orders, and he had been instructed only to monitor the column.

⁴⁰⁶ De Jager in Union of South Africa, *Conduct*, p 15.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p 16.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

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A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 22.1.1917; NAN RCO 15/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Staff Officer Ovamboland Expeditionary Force, 4.1.1917.

⁴⁰³ NAN A 450, Hahn Vol 23, Intelligence Diary, 22.1.1917 and 28.1.1917.

⁴⁰⁴ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1917.

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⁴⁰⁶ De Jager in Union of South Africa, *Conduct*, p 15.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., p 16.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

approached Ehole from the western side. By 1.30 p.m. the guides and scouts at the vanguard of the Union troops were only 1200 yards from Mandume's *embala* and a brief rest was called. Hahn reported urgently to de Jager that his scouts could hear Mandume's men calling one another in the thick scrub nearby.

Lieut Hahn had barely given me this information when two shots were heard in quick succession from the direction of our right front, a few seconds pause, and then a terrific fusillade of rifle fire followed. About thirty seconds after the fusillade had commenced, a number of riderless horses and some pack animals came careering out of the bush and galloped through the main body, whereby the ranks of this body were thrown into disorder: here and there men could be seen falling back, some mounted, others on foot. An attempt was made to stop and capture the infuriated animals, but with little success.⁴⁰⁹

De Jager, finding 'that the enemy had penetrated our right front and were getting in close proximity to where the main body was',⁴¹⁰ ordered a rally. After initial difficulties the maxim guns were brought up, and the Kwanyama rush was checked. It soon became a dispersal.

The enemy, being dismounted and very swift of foot, retreated through dense scrub and fields of millet, and it was very difficult for our troops to locate and follow them up, and, by the time Mandume's kraal was reached, those who were not shot down had entirely disappeared.⁴¹¹

Kwanyama snipers hidden in trees still managed to pick off several targets before being located. Union troops then entered Mandume's *embala* and set it ablaze. The whole engagement had lasted only thirty minutes. It was at this point that news was brought that Mandume's dead body had been found nearby.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., p 17.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

There were about four bullet wounds in a line across the chest and one in the neck... he appears to have fought very determinedly.⁴¹²

De Jager later ascertained the number of casualties at nine European members of the Expedition dead, thirteen wounded, and three black members missing. 38 Kwanyama dead were found: de Jager estimated a probable total of 100 dead and wounded on their side.⁴¹³ The political tasks of establishing a council of headmen to replace the kingship,⁴¹⁴ as well as disarmament and labour recruitment,⁴¹⁵ could now take prominence. The task of the expedition was effectively completed with the death of the Kwanyama king.

The depiction of the dead king was highly suggestive: gone were the western clothes he usually affected.

He was on this occasion in savage 'War paint' with sundry ornaments and medicines about his neck and waist. Only clothed in a coat and loincloth.⁴¹⁶

The 'medicines' recall Mandume's attitude before facing the Portuguese in battle, suggesting a deep engagement with Kwanyama ancestral beliefs. De Jager may have stated 'with his demise the trouble would end, the last shot had been fired,'⁴¹⁷ but for the Kwanyama the affair was far from over. In some quarters, new forms of resistance were substituted for the palpable defeat of military resistance. African discourse constructed an interpretation of his death which radically diverged from European accounts. There is no mention of suicide in official accounts, but the news which spread quickly on the

⁴¹² NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1917.

⁴¹³ De Jager in Union of South Africa, *Conduct*, p 18.

⁴¹⁴ NAN RCO 15/1916/1, Fairlie, Report, 25.3.1917; Fairlie, Report, 13.3.1917; RCO Vol 9 File 9, UG Representative Namakunde, Annual Report 1917.

⁴¹⁵ NAN RCO Vol 9 File 9, RC Ovamboland Annual Report, 1917; interview with Jeremia Benjamin, Oshigambo, 2.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 156).

⁴¹⁶ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 2, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1917.

⁴¹⁷ De Jager in Union of South Africa, *Conduct*, p 18.

ground⁴¹⁸ and over the border⁴¹⁹ was that Mandume had been wounded and had then killed himself with his own revolver.⁴²⁰ This version built on his suicide statements. It has become central to oral tradition, for it is an explanation that rounds off the Kwanyama king's life in the most socially healing way.

⁴¹⁸ De Jager noted how rapidly news of his death spread, though not that it was suicide. De Jager in Union of South Africa, *Conduct*, p 18.

⁴¹⁹ AGCSp 476-A-IV, Situation des missions 1911-30, p 205. Spiritan missionaries recorded his suicide.

⁴²⁰ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 80); interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 105); interview with Alina Heita, Onamukulo, 11.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 118); interview with Heikia Amwele, Okaku, 6.3.1990. According to the last source, the revolver was named 'Iiyambo.' Mandume certainly possessed a revolver which he habitually carried; see NAN RCO 10/1916/1 Vol 2, Hahn Report, 6 December 1916; Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, p 6.

CHAPTER 6

1917-1928: OVAMBOLAND UNDER
MARTIAL LAW AND EARLY MANDATE

This chapter examines the development of colonial policies and their impact in Ovamboland between 1915 and 1928, including the final demarcation of the SWA-Angola boundary. The colonial priority was to establish conditions favourable to labour migration. This was central to all the problems of the period and is examined in the second part of the chapter.

The colonial context in SWA

The first six years of South African rule under martial law, from 1915 to 1921, held little scope for consistent or coherent policies. It was a holding job; in Ovamboland, a matter of 'sitting tight'.¹ As Emmett argues, South Africa still had to build her case for a mandatory award which would establish her legal hold on SWA.² She claimed, first, that SWA was essential for South Africa's national security; second, that Germany was unfit to rule.³ South Africa therefore had to show a more enlightened administrative outlook, especially in 'native' administration. In certain respects, African interests temporarily took priority over settler interests in the Police Zone.⁴

¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 14.5.1916.

² Emmett, 'Popular resistance in Namibia', in Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, pp 226-7.

³ *Ibid.*, pp 226-7; W.K. Hancock and Jean van der Poel, *Selections from the Smuts Papers, Vol III, June 1910 - November 1918* (Cambridge 1966), p 655. See also Union of South Africa, *Report on the Natives of South West Africa and their treatment by Germany* (Pretoria, 1918), Cd. 9146.

⁴ Emmett, 'Popular resistance', p 228.

Since the Germans had not committed atrocities in Ovamboland and South Africa had only the bare skeleton of an administration there, the effects of reforms were felt only indirectly. But officials in the north were not immune from the 'tentative liberalism'⁵ which imbued early central administration. This spurt of liberalism, inappropriate as it was to the overall labour-extractive economy, quickly evaporated after the granting of the mandate in 1921,⁶ for mines needed labour, as did infrastructural works such as railways.

But before it disappeared, it sustained the relatively non-interventionist approach of officials in the north. This of course was one of the paradoxes of early colonialism for the Ovambo; it contradicted Ovambo migrants' experience of the Police Zone where their labour still suffered a high degree of exploitation. A second contradiction was that the light hand of native administration was always backed by the threat of overwhelming military force.⁷ Mandume's removal was a case in point.

Yet the administration congratulated itself upon its paternalism. For example, when Ndonga labourers avoided controls with methods perfected under the German *régime*, the RC reported:

Martin called a meeting of the headmen and pointed out the stupidity of this practice - they are now under a government which is doing everything to help the native.⁸

The ethos in the Union Native Affairs Department had similar overtones in the Ovamboland administration. The notion of 'personal example', urged especially upon Fairlie in the volatile Neutral Zone in 1916,⁹ echoed the

⁵ *Ibid.*, p 229.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 88.

⁸ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 24.9.1917.

⁹ NAN RCO Vol 8 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary SWA, 14.5.1916.

Transkeian ideal of the administrator as both 'a chief in traditional society and a Victorian patriarch.'¹⁰

Ovamboland shared some of the practical difficulties encountered by the new administration in SWA. Staff were thin on the ground. But where officials dealing with native administration - especially magistrates in the south - were often inexperienced and ill-informed,¹¹ this was less the case in the north, which was the only area where conventional structures of native administration were installed.¹² The RC had great administrative autonomy within Ovamboland. Unlike magistrates in southern SWA seconded from the Union Department of Justice on four-year tenure periods,¹³ officials in Ovamboland served longer periods. This continuity in time bred a more cohesive approach. Manning, the first RC in Ovamboland and from 1920 Native Commissioner (NC) for SWA,¹⁴ was replaced by Hahn and then Eedes, both of whom had prior long service there.¹⁵ Between 1915 and the late 1940s there were only three NCs in Ovamboland. Hahn's brand of paternalism, later exemplified in terms of 'indirect rule', derived from the early practice of the Ovamboland administration. Gorges, the contemporary Administrator for SWA, was also associated with benevolent paternalism.¹⁶

But the paternalism in Ovamboland differed somewhat from that in the Union. Ovamboland was an unstable frontier region; access to enforcement was vital to officials, who uniformly held military rank. Yet administration was bound by the need firstly to win the mandate award,

¹⁰ Saul Dubow, *Racial Segregation and the Origins of Apartheid in South Africa, 1919-36* (London, 1989), p 101. See also Edgar H. Brookes, *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day* (Cape Town, 1924) p 93.

¹¹ Emmett, 'Popular resistance,' p 227.

¹² Rhodes House Library, MSS Afr S 744, Lord Hailey, 'A Survey of Native Affairs in South West Africa', Section III (unpublished typescript, 1946).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Eedes had served as UG Representative in Oshikango, then was posted to the Kavango as NC between 1933 and 1946. See Lawrence G. Green, *Lords of the Last Frontier* (Cape Town, 1952), p 172.

¹⁶ Emmett, 'Rise of nationalism,' p 162.

secondly to conform to its terms. Much secondary literature glosses over the transitional period of martial law and argues that indirect rule was implemented in Ovamboland from the start.¹⁷ But the point must be made that at the end of World War 1, 'indirect rule' as an ideological framework for colonial administration had not as yet been formulated. Until its principles were elaborated by Lugard and others, British and Union officials relied on systems they developed in their regions, often meeting practical problems with practical solutions.¹⁸ For the skeleton Union administration in Ovamboland, their initial system was characterised by minimal interference in tribal affairs and the least possible state expenditure.¹⁹ Colonial discourse rationalised this in paternalist terms, but it was a 'neat coincidence of interest between private altruism and public parsimony.'²⁰

Levelling and laissez-faire

The initial preoccupation of colonial officials with controlling and finally destroying the Kwanyama kingship overshadowed early formulations of broader policies towards Ovamboland as a whole. The most useful way of understanding colonial restructuring of political authority in Ovamboland is to see it as a levelling process, which reduced or increased power exercised by existing rulers. The administration sought 'partnership' with autochthonous leaders who should be capable of controlling their own subjects. The Kwanyama in particular were believed to have been deeply conditioned by

¹⁷ Moorsom, 'Formation,' p 88; Williams, *Precolonial Communities*, p 156; Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' p 4.

¹⁸ A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *The Principles of Native Administration in Nigeria: Selected Documents, 1900-1947* (London, 1965), p 11; Robert O. Collins, *Shadows in the Grass. Britain in the Southern Sudan, 1918-1956* (New Haven, 1983), p 2.

¹⁹ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 88.

²⁰ Colin Murray, *Families Divided: the impact of migrant labour in Lesotho* (Cambridge, 1981), p 14, citing J.E. Spence, *Lesotho. The Politics of Dependence* (London, 1968), p 24.

authoritarianism, requiring a strong hand.²¹ But when leaders showed insubordination within the partnership and were prepared to use violence, they were removed or reduced in power.

Mandume, obviously, had been too independent, too capable of mobilising numerous and armed support to be contained by a handful of white officers. The vacuum created by his removal led eventually to the creation of a council of headmen in Oukwanyama, though initially the UG Representative in Namakunde worked informally with three 'disinterested' headmen²² who had been outside Mandume's close circle. The most prominent headmen in Oukwanyama were now Noyoma, Aufiku, Ndjukuma and Hamukoto wa Kaluvi.²³ As the actual 'council of headmen' crystallised, these headmen assumed jurisdictions which were smaller than Mandume's had been, but larger and more legitimised than any previous *omalenga*.

In the absence of royal authority the UG Representative in Namakunde claimed to have replaced the king's over-arching political authority;²⁴ Martin ka Dikwa in Ondonga represented some *ersatz* ideological authority for the Kwanyama now without a king.²⁵

Throughout Ovamboland weaker rulers were buttressed and the stronger curtailed. Where no centralised rulers existed, these were created. The west represented rather special problems and will be examined separately. The point was that where 'levelling' was effective officials could then afford to maintain a *laissez-faire* presence, not interrupting political organisation that worked smoothly 'by itself,' especially with regard to migrant labour. Their interventions tended to be towards that end.

²¹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1 v 1, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary SWA, 14.5.1916.

²² NAN RCO 10/1919/8, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.8.1917.

²³ NAN RCO 10/1919/8, Memo of meeting with Ovakuanyama headmen by RC Ovamboland and UG Representative Namakunde, 7.12.1917.

²⁴ NAN RCO Vol 4 3/1919, C.N. Manning's Memorandum re Ipumbu, 2.1.1922.

²⁵ Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 80-1).

These processes emerged clearly once official began tackling the administrative problems which hung over from the destabilised period of occupation, famine and Kwanyama resistance. Among the most urgent was the suppression of cattle-raiding and the trade in arms and slaves. Kings and headmen were forced to suspend their independent trade with the agents of merchant capital. A system of entry permits controlled non-official, non-missionary access to Ovamboland, effectively sealing off the region from outside contact.²⁶ The movement of cattle outside the region was also prohibited.²⁷ Loopholes for arms smuggling were observed very closely and efforts at disarmament commenced.²⁸

The incorporative character of internal slavery in Ovamboland was attested by the fact that once slave trading was prohibited in SWA, no official mention of the existence of slavery in Ovamboland was ever made in reports to the League of Nations.²⁹ Loeb argues that slave status transmuted inconspicuously into 'servant' status; that servants in 1940s households were the descendants of slaves.³⁰ Conclusions are difficult on the basis of scanty evidence, but the abolition of the slave trade appears to have been accompanied by the deeper submergence of internal slavery, especially to outside view. New forms of dependency had emerged.³¹

To bring Ovamboland into line with the 'civilising' impact of British colonial methods elsewhere in Africa, kings and headmen were pressured to

²⁶ NAN RCO 1/1916/2, Secretary Protectorate - RC Ovamboland, 17.2.1916; RCO 2/1916/1, Deputy Secretary Protectorate - RC Ovamboland, 17.4.1917; Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 76.

²⁷ NAN RCO 7/1916/2, Administrator SWA - OC NA Windhoek, 1.4.1922.

²⁸ NAN RCO 10/1919/8, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.5.1918; Memo of meeting with Ovakuanyama headmen by RC Ovamboland and UG Representative Namakunde, 7.12.1917.

²⁹ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1924, p 29; Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1928, p 57.

³⁰ Loeb, *Feudal Africa*, pp 124-6.

³¹ Several female slaves from Mandume's household fled to the protection of King Martin. These included women who had been 'prostitutes' of the Portuguese and were captured by Kalola. NAN RCO 10/1919/8, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 29.10.1917.

cease witchcraft accusations and lost their prerogative to award the death penalty in criminal cases.³² Serious criminal cases such as rape and murder were judged by the RC.

Kings and headmen were therefore emasculated in the exercise of power. But their authority was reinforced, if not reified, in other ways. After his assistance against Mandume, the king of Ondonga had a powerful source of support against internal opposition. Ondonga was now the most important polity since the division of Oukwanyama into three sections and the king needed support against royal rivals. This had its roots in Martin's own accession in 1912, when his mother Mutaleni engineered his succession in the teeth of strong claims from candidates subsequently forced into exile.³³ The decision of the administration to support Martin ka Dikwa showed continuity with the German policy in 1908 which had intervened to end Ndonga political fission.³⁴ 'Had anything happened to the Chief,' wrote the RC, 'great unsettlement would naturally have resulted.'³⁵

When his main rival Kambonde applied to enter Ovamboland in 1916, the RC advised Windhoek

that he and his brother-in-exile - Martin Kambonde - be prohibited from coming anywhere north of Windhoek or Karibib besides being repudiated by the Government should they set up claims amongst labourers in the South.³⁶

A second royal *elenga* Nambagu ka Kambonde, entered quietly with the first Ovamboland Expedition in 1915.³⁷ After a variety of 'political offences' he was expelled and prohibited from returning to Ovamboland.³⁸ As Martin had

³² NAN RCO 1/1916/2, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 5.3.1916.

³³ NAN RCO 9/1916, Explanatory Notes, Ondonga chieftaincy, RC Ovamboland, July 1916.

³⁴ NAN ZBU W II k 3, Franke - Leutwein, 14.10.1908.

³⁵ NAN RCO 2/1916/7, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 3.8.1916.

³⁶ NAN RCO 2/1916/5, RC Ovamboland - OC Native Affairs Windhoek, 3.10.1916.

³⁷ NAN RCO 2/1916/7, RC Ovamboland - Deputy Secretary Protectorate, 3.8.1916.

³⁸ NAN RCO 2/1916/7, RC Ovamboland - OC Native Affairs Windhoek, 28.2.1917; RC Ovamboland - Military Magistrate Tsumeb, 28.2.1917; RC Ovamboland -

refrained from executing Nambagu, his 'extraordinary leniency' was praised,³⁹ though he had executed two other exiles from the Kambonde faction, Uwango and Jonathan, in 1916.⁴⁰ More instability threatened with the appearance of a presumptive heir. The RC wrote:

If he remains he will certainly be killed and protection on our part would probably cause a very serious revulsion of feeling against the administration.⁴¹

He too was expelled in 1916.

This phase of consolidation of the Ndonga kingship continued with an incident in 1917 involving Sheetekela. Martin complained his authority was undermined by Sheetekela's personally disastrous action in shooting an Ndonga man passing through Oukwanyama.⁴² Sheetekela lost his status as headman. After initial reluctance, he paid a fine and took up temporary exile in the Kavango.⁴³ The incident defined the new parameters and realities of local power. Sheetekela's action read like a symptom of the violence of the old Angolan slaving frontier;⁴⁴ the Ndonga response, backed by colonial pressure, caused such violence to retreat.

Secretary Protectorate, 25.1.1917; RC Ovamboland - Liljeblad, 31.8.1916; Liljeblad - Manning, n.d.

³⁹ NAN RCO 2/1916/7, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 25.1.1917.

⁴⁰ NAN RCO 2/1916/7, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative, 24.11.1916.

⁴¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/7, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative, 24.11.1916.

⁴² NAN RCO 10/1917/6, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 11.12.1917; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 4.11.1917; Interview between Major Manning and Chief Martin, 3.11.1917.

⁴³ NAN RCO 10/1917/6, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 11.12.1917; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 11.11.1917; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 21.11.1917; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 13.9.1918; RCO 10/1919/8 UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 8.12.1917; interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 198).

⁴⁴ NAN RCO 10/1917/6, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 11.12.1917.

The politics of western Ovamboland

The Ndonga succession and Sheetekela incident revealed a great deal about the pent-up pressures in eastern Ovamboland. Colonial occupation brought an alternative process of decompression to the west, mainly through the termination of raiding by the bigger eastern polities. Western defensive measures against this raiding were evident to officials in 1916 in the fortifications around homesteads and baobab trees.⁴⁵ Labour migration from the western polities had been minimal before 1915;⁴⁶ now the impingements of the mercantile frontier were replaced by colonial pressure on political leaders to promote migration to labour centres.⁴⁷

The RC's tour of these marginal western polities in 1916 and 1917 had further political objectives. Arms smuggling with Angola and especially Kaokoland⁴⁸ was endemic in these outlying areas.⁴⁹ Gun-running had been particularly prevalent during the great famine, when weapons had been exchanged for food. Chiefs denied involvement in such arms smuggling, claiming it had been very much a grassroots matter in the famine.⁵⁰ As a preventive measure, the RC implemented measures to sever intercourse between north-western Ovamboland and Kaokoland. In 1917 the Kwaluudhi king Mwala's cattle-herders in Kaoko territory were disarmed and passes were introduced between the two regions.⁵¹

⁴⁵ NAN RCO Vol 8 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.3.1916.

⁴⁶ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 31.1.1918; RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 8.3.1918; RCO 3/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 7.3.1917.

⁴⁷ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989.

⁴⁸ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1917; RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 27.11.1917; RCO 2/1916/1, Deputy Secretary Protectorate - ?, 17.4.1917.

⁴⁹ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1917.

⁵⁰ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1917.

⁵¹ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1917.

During his first western tour of February 1916, the prime problem to confront Manning on reaching Onkolonkadi and Eunda was banditry.⁵²

These people [of Eunda] are much reduced in numbers through famine and raids. They are without cohesion and a prey to any marauders, who appear to have been the well armed and organised... though small party of Ombandja living amongst them - in fact often having usurped their werfts and numerous little pole and mud forts at the bases of giant baobab trees.⁵³

Manning ordered the Mbandja to allow former owners to re-occupy their homesteads. He reorganised the local Mbandja community under the chiefship of Mwala, the 'scattered peoples' of Onkolonkadi and Eunda under Mwala's headman Kapanda,⁵⁴ and another group of Eunda under Tshanika in Ongandjera.⁵⁵ The solution the RC devised was therefore to bring small or fragmented groups under bigger political units. Levelling here worked towards the aggrandisement of kings in Uukwaluudhi and Ongandjera. After Manning's 1916 visit little banditry was reported from the Eunda.⁵⁶ The Mbandja were said to have moved as a group from Onkolonkadi and settled in Mwala's area.⁵⁷ The RC kept up pressure on the Mbandja to accept the authority of the western chiefs.

In early 1918 Tshanika faced an armed threat from several nephews who sought to contest his right to the Ngandjera kingship.⁵⁸ Among them was Amniera, who had taken refuge with Mwala.⁵⁹ The RC unusually gave his permission for arms to be used, in the interests of Tshanika keeping his position. The RC saw this as an internal matter in which he would not

⁵² NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Alho, 27.1.1916; RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 27.1.1916; Alho - RC Ovamboland, 22.1.1916; Mwala - RC Ovamboland, 26.12.1915.

⁵³ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, Manning - UG Representative Namakunde, 29.2.1916.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, Alho - RC Ovamboland, 5.8.1916.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1918.

⁵⁹ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, Extracts RC's Diary - Secretary Protectorate, 1 - 7.3.1918.

interfere.⁶⁰ Tshanika also received reassurances from the RC after he made complaints about the insubordination of young men, possibly migrant labourers.⁶¹

On his tours Manning reinforced what central control existed in the west, pressuring subjects to accept chiefs' decisions in cattle cases.⁶² For example, a case of Himba who had abused 'a trust or rather a great privilege amongst the natives here, namely being given cattle to use and look after,'⁶³ was found in Tshanika's favour. However, the ideological buttresses so striking in the eastern polities, upon which the incipient system of indirect rule could rest, were lacking in these marginal western polities. Officials complained about the weakness and ineffectiveness of Mwala and Tshanika.⁶⁴ In mopping up the vestiges of post-famine banditry, officials often found themselves supporting ordinary cattle-owners in litigation, not chiefs.⁶⁵ Mbandja whose cattle had been lent out and not returned, for example, had their cases taken up against defaulters.⁶⁶ Tshanika was reprimanded for his questionable expulsion of a litigant; the RC warned him not to forget 'we have "long ears and big eyes" and that we see and hear everything he does.'⁶⁷

Despite these checks on chiefly abuse, few of the huge number of cattle cases - the legacy of famine and dislocation - were dealt with and recorded by officials. Most were probably resolved in favour of presiding kings. Dissatisfaction with their handling showed, in that cases continued to be brought to officials until 1920, when a 'moratorium' on all such claims was finally enforced.⁶⁸

⁶⁰ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 18.2.1918.

⁶¹ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 9.11.1917.

⁶² NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC - Waananen, 13.11.1917.

⁶³ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Asst Military Magistrate Outjo, 26.3.1917.

⁶⁴ NAN RCO 3/1919 Tshanika, UG Representative Namakunde - Dickman Ondongua, 10.4.1919.

⁶⁵ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 13.11.1917.

⁶⁶ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 29.8.1917.

⁶⁷ NAN RCO Tshanika, RC Ovamboland - Missionary Ongandjera, 13.4.1919.

⁶⁸ NAN RCO 3/1919 Tshanika, RC Ovamboland - Saari, 15.1.1919; Manning - Saari, 3.8.1920.

In general therefore the administration reinforced the relatively weak central authority in western polities. The area's specific problems showed the short-term effects of famine and banditry⁶⁹ and the longer term effects of raiding and war on decentralised communities.⁷⁰ An exception to this generalisation was Ombalantu, which presented unique features of resistance and adaptation to colonial rule. The acephalous community was not amenable to the same approach used with others, given its absence of central authority and its independence from the control of neighbouring polities.⁷¹

[T]he position of the other Chiefless tribe viz Ombarantu, is different. They occupy a large and fertile piece of country and are a powerful independent lot. They are evidently rather dreaded by the people of chiefs Ipumbu, Tshanika and Muala.⁷²

The RC possibly hoped to circumvent difficulties in 1917 by restoring a member of the Mbalantu royal family to authority. A highly suggestive oral account implies that a subtle form of resistance emerged in the encounter:

When the colonialists came to Mbalanhu..., they came to the house of Ipanda. They called the people together. People in Ombalanhu thought whites did not want kings, because it was 1917 when they had just killed Mandume. They asked the people who belonged to Kamaho's⁷³ clan. People denied that any descendants of Kamaho were alive, as they thought they would be killed. They were then told to choose a leader. They chose the man Ipanda for the whole of Ombalanhu to be the one to deal with the Boers.⁷⁴ They asked him to choose four other headmen to help him. One of them was Manyangapu.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ NAN RCO 3/1916/3, Waananen - RC Ovamboland, 24.12.1915; RC Ovamboland - Waananen, 30.12.1915.

⁷⁰ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 29.2.1916.

⁷¹ NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 29.2.1916.

⁷² NAN RCO 3/1916/4, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 29.2.1916.

⁷³ Kamaho was the last king of Ombalantu, deposed and killed by his subjects; the date is uncertain.

⁷⁴ NAN RCO 3/1916/5, RC Ovamboland - ?, witness Hahn, 13.3.1917; interview with Simeon Heita, Onawa, 19.2.1990; interview with Modestus Andowa, Anamulenge, 4.11.1989.

⁷⁵ Interview with Reverend Titus Iita, Onakayale, 3.11.1989.

These headmen in time accrued more power than had previously been enjoyed by those elders in Ombalantu who had controlled the fragmented clan-centred social organisation.⁷⁶ Their authority was reinforced at an early stage by administrative measures against bandits in the polity. The latter were smoked out and subjected to public floggings.⁷⁷

The western polities emerged as states which had resisted but at the same time been much weakened by the inroads on their cattle herds and the constant insecurity of annual raids. Famine and war had a tremendously disruptive impact and were mainly responsible for the ravages of banditry in 1915-17, but it was clear that these communities had long been impinged upon by forces from the east that were more closely articulated with mercantilism and commoditisation. If not for *Pax Britannica*, this internal slaving and raiding frontier might have transformed these western polities further, especially the more centralised, reorienting them further towards commoditisation in the terms dictated by the mercantilism of the period. Instead, raiding was halted and they were incorporated into the wider Ovambo pattern of labour migration to the southern mines. The fact that labour migrated from western Ovamboland after 1915 suggests the existence of its preconditions, which in turn implies that some reorientation towards commoditisation of production had begun in the west under merchant capital. For as Kimble argues for Basutoland, labour migration was a manifestation of the process of commoditisation of production.⁷⁸

Another effect of colonial rule for Ombalantu was the erosion of its isolation.⁷⁹ This facilitated migrant labour, but also brought the Mbalantu into

⁷⁶ NAN RCO Vol 8 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 27.10.1918; RCO Vol 4 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 24.9.1921.

⁷⁷ NAN RCO Vol 8 File 9, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 27.10.1918.

⁷⁸ Kimble, 'Labour migration,' pp 119-20.

⁷⁹ Prior to this few people from other Ovambo polities entered Ombalantu. Interview with Sheetekela and Lukas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, p 194).

the orbit of internal migrations, still pronounced after the great movements during the famine and Portuguese occupation of the border region.

Ombalantu offered new openings to the land-hungry dislocated after 1917, as a relatively unexploited and fertile area. It empowered those headmen with authority to allocate land; considerable land alienation resulted.

Oral testimony links the opening up of Ombalantu to the decline of pre-colonial lineage methods of land management. Implicit in the following account is that the latter were more effective in sustaining cultivation.

As colonialism started, the village and the land no longer belonged to the clan in Ombalanhu. People came from other tribes. Ombalanhu is now desertified and its people mixed with other tribes. Previously there were big forests and wild animals, now there is nothing.⁸⁰

Obviously this testimony can be criticised as telescoped, a projection of contemporary concerns. Nonetheless it remains fair to argue that it touches on processes which evolved slowly, even if not always visibly in the short term. Equally, the distinct cultural sense the Mbalantu possessed of the separateness of their identity and polity throws consciousness of socio-economic and ecological processes there into sharper relief than elsewhere in the western communities.

Ipumbu ya Tshilongo: the fly in the ointment

Ipumbu ya Tshilongo's troubled relations with colonial officials and missionaries extended over a long period, suggesting a continuity with the attitude of his predecessor Negumbo who defied Germany in 1900.⁸¹ The entire 'Ipumbu affair' which sputtered on sporadically between 1921 and 1932

⁸⁰ Interview with Titus Iita, Nakayale, 3.11.1989.

⁸¹ See Chapter 4.

represented a vocal anti-colonialism that was at variance with other Ovambo social formations. Internally it made explicit the faultlines of tension over central control by kings, especially over male labour and female sexuality. Crisis brought these into higher relief than elsewhere.

Ipumbu had in fact several agendas. With the eclipse of Oukwanyama in 1915-17 as the leading independent polity and most significant military power, Ipumbu apparently intended to fill this vacuum through the same methods which had produced Kwanyama hegemony: trade, migrant labour and militarisation. He placed Uukwambi in direct competition with Ondonga for predominance in Ovamboland. He believed he could play off external political forces against each other, much in the manner all eastern Ovambo kings had done before the arrival of resident colonial officials.⁸²

Internal checks could not work in the same way as in the pre-colonial Kwanyama case. The smaller Kwambi polity was more successfully centralised under kingship; *omalenga* had less power as a counterweight group than in the larger Ndonga and Kwanyama polities. The most prominent *omalenga* who fell out of favour, such as Festus⁸³ and Itamara,⁸⁴ became exiles and gravitated towards colonial collaboration from an early date. The group of *omalenga* around Ipumbu continued to fluctuate.

The first Kwambi crisis of the early 1920s was precipitated by demographic and ecological pressures. A crucial ecological implication of colonial rule in Ovamboland, argues Moorsom, was that:

the sudden ending of inter-tribal raiding removed one major disincentive from colonising the forest belts or exploiting them more freely for raw materials.⁸⁵

⁸² NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 9.1.1920; RC Ovamboland - Military Magistrate Tsumeb, 3.1.1920.

⁸³ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.9.1919; Fairlie - Manning, 1.5.1918; Statement Festus to Fairlie, 7.5.1918.

⁸⁴ NAN NAO Vol 18, File 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report December 1925; OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report April 1926.

⁸⁵ Moorsom, 'Formation,' p 89.

A situation had arisen where, in the forest belt separating Kwanyama from Kwambi settlements demarcated by two *omuramba*, mutual encroachment had occurred.⁸⁶ The process did not commence with colonial occupation, but was accelerated by it.⁸⁷ The area where problems developed had in fact been claimed by Nande ya Hedimbi; the Kwambi claim to the area was a new initiative.⁸⁸ It suggested an attempt at Kwambi expansion. Ipumbu made a similar bid by sending herders to establish cattle posts north of Uukwambi in 1930, encroaching on land set aside between Oukwanyama and Ombalantu for the Mbandja. The latter were by then under the rehabilitated Sheetekela's headmanship.⁸⁹

In the 1921 dispute, two raids were carried out by Kwambi men on the homestead of Hinjambi, a Kwanyama sub-headman.⁹⁰ No cattle were appropriated, which was interpreted by the Kwanyama as a direct act of war.⁹¹ Local Kwanyama men were absent during the second raid because, unlike the Kwambi, they had turned out in force for a labour recruitment meeting elsewhere.⁹² Investigation into the local politics of settlement revealed that the Kwambi had 'broken their old rule' and begun settling in the intervening bush area between Kwanyama and Kwambi settlements. They had then encroached over the *oshana* to where Kwanyama homesteads were established.⁹³ The RC believed Ipumbu had deliberately promoted Kwambi

⁸⁶ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC Manning, Memorandum re Ipumbu, 8.1.1922, annexure map.

⁸⁷ Siiskonen, 'Environmental Impacts,' p 13; idem, *Trade*, p 43.

⁸⁸ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC Manning, Memorandum re Ipumbu, 8.1.1922; RC Ovamboland - Ipumbu, 3.1.1922.

⁸⁹ NAN NAO Vol 9, File 5/2, OC Oshikango Station Oukwanyama - NC Ovamboland, 21.7.1930.

⁹⁰ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 6.1.1922.

⁹¹ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC Manning, Memorandum re Ipumbu, 8.1.1922; Annexure 1, Manning Memorandum, 27.12.1921; NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 6.1.1922.

⁹² NAN RCO 3/1919, NC Manning - Secretary SWA, 3.12.1921.

⁹³ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC Manning, Memorandum re Ipumbu, 8.1.1922.

settler encroachment.⁹⁴ Local officials initially requested a small European force be prepared for military action against Ipumbu.⁹⁵ While this was mooted, a fine of twenty cattle was imposed.⁹⁶

Frustration with Ipumbu's unco-operative attitude had been building up for some time. In 1919, when he was accused of the 'wanton killing' of three subjects, Ipumbu had agreed verbally to send compensation to the relatives of those killed,⁹⁷ but evaded doing so. Only the instructions from Windhoek, noted the RC, had prevented the administration from using force against Ipumbu up to this point, despite the provocation being as great as in the case of Mbalantu banditry.⁹⁸

In 1921, Hahn tersely reported rumours circulating as to:

further killing, witchcraft rumours, chasing out of innocent people, attitude leading to interference free travelling through Ukuambi area which on main North west Ondonga route, loss of Government prestige.⁹⁹

Even before the raid on Kwanyama territory, Ipumbu had begun gathering large numbers of armed men around his *embala* whenever he was expecting official visitors.¹⁰⁰ Hostile treatment was meted out to government messengers.¹⁰¹ Further dissatisfaction over Ipumbu concerned his disrespect for missionaries who worked in Uukwambi or who passed through the

⁹⁴ NAN RCO 3/1919, Further notes re Ipumbu for record, Tsumeb, 18.12.1921; NC Manning, Memorandum re Ipumbu, 8.1.1922.

⁹⁵ NAN RCO 3/1919, Manning, Swakopmund - ?, 5.12.1921.

⁹⁶ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Ipumbu, 18.2.1922; RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.10.1922.

⁹⁷ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.9.1919; NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 9.12.1922.

⁹⁸ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 9.1.1920; Manning - Administrator, 26.9.1921.

⁹⁹ NAN RCO 3/1919, Confidential: Notes re behaviour of Chief Ipumbu, Manning - ?, 25.5.1923.

¹⁰⁰ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.2.1923; RC (?), Further notes re Ipumbu for record, Tsumeb, 18.12.1921.

¹⁰¹ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC ? - Secretary SWA, 9.12.1922; NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 6.1.1922.

polity,¹⁰² besides his treatment of Kwambi Christians.¹⁰³ These Finnish missionaries had been requested to leave the area for their own safety, but refused.¹⁰⁴ Notice of Ipumbu's treatment of women began to creep into correspondence.¹⁰⁵

Uukwambi occupied a strategic position in Ovamboland. It straddled the central area, west of Oukwanyama and Ondonga, controlling access to Ongandjera, Ombalantu, Uukwaluudhi, Onkolonkadi, Eunda, and the whole vast area of Kaokoland and the Cunene river beyond.¹⁰⁶ This had important implications for official access to these areas, which could only with difficulty avoid Uukwambi and use the northern Kwanyama area to reach the far west.¹⁰⁷ The flow of migrant labour from western areas through to Ondangwa was also hindered by political problems in Uukwambi.¹⁰⁸

Officials also noted that recent internal refugees within Ovamboland tended to be Kwambi, suggesting internal tensions were very high.¹⁰⁹ In their eyes Uukwambi was quite out of step with the political climate in the neighbouring larger polities. The need to localise the Ipumbu problem was paramount.

Ipumbu is the fly in the ointment in Ovamboland, and when you have a large number of natives, fairly well armed,

¹⁰² NAN RCO 3/1919, Ondonga - NC SWA, Re: Ipumbu, 1923; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.9.1919; RC Ovamboland (?), Further notes re Ipumbu for record, Tsumeb, 18.12.1921; Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' p 5.

¹⁰³ NAN RCO 3/1919, Missionary Saari - RC Ovamboland, 4.10.1920; Missionary Saari - RC Ovamboland, 22.2.1921; interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 176).

¹⁰⁴ NAN RCO 3/1919, NC SWA Manning - Secretary SWA, 1.8.1923.

¹⁰⁵ NAN RCO 3/1919, Missionary Tylvas - RC Ovamboland, 3.8.1922; Extracts letters Dickman - Manning, February - April 1921; RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 9.1.1920.

¹⁰⁶ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.2.1923.

¹⁰⁷ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland (?), Further notes re Ipumbu for record, Tsumeb, 18.12.1921; NC Manning - Secretary SWA, 3.12.1921.

¹⁰⁸ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.2.1923; NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 9.12.1922; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.9.1919.

¹⁰⁹ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.2.1923; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.9.1919.

who are still independent in a way, it is as well to be careful, and not allow the fire to spread too far.¹¹⁰

An important factor in Ipumbu's room for action within his own polity was that there was no official presence in Uukwambi, unlike both Ondonga and Oukwanyama which had resident colonial officials. This made it difficult to curb his arms dealing - of which the administration could never find concrete proof - and stirred up anxieties over illegal arms trading between Angola and the whole Ovambo area.¹¹¹

A further and weighty colonial grievance with Ipumbu arose from the dropping off in the number of Kwambi labour migrants from about 1921.¹¹²

Although Uukuambi area has never been a recruiting centre of much importance it is significant that very few recruits have registered during the last six months.¹¹³

Those who would have taken up labour contracts were the very group who were now mobilised to be present and armed at Ipumbu's *embala*.¹¹⁴ 'Ipumbu is very restless nowadays and is growing stronger in that his young bloods follow him more closely and loyally than before.'¹¹⁵ However, oral testimony reveals that deep tensions existed behind mobilisation and that some resisted.¹¹⁶

The confrontation over the Kwambi attack on the area claimed by Kwanyama settlers fizzled on into 1923. It began taking on features of

¹¹⁰ NAN RCO 3/1919, Deputy Commissioner SWA Police - Secretary SWA, 6.8.1921.

¹¹¹ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 9.1.1920; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.9.1919; RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 28.12.1922; Statement Festus, 28.12.1922; RC Ovamboland - Resident Magistrate Outjo, 29.12.1922.

¹¹² NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland (?), Further notes re Ipumbu for record, Tsumeb, 18.12.1921; NC Manning - Secretary SWA, 3.12.1921; NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 6.1.1922.

¹¹³ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - NC SWA, 25.1.1923.

¹¹⁴ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 175-6).

¹¹⁵ NAN RCO 3/1919, Hahn - NC SWA in Ovamboland, 28.1.1923.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 161 and 175-6).

millenarian resistance, imported from southern labour centres. According to Hahn's intelligence sources, Ipumbu had received information about the activities of 'the Americans'.¹¹⁷ He had heard

the Americans had chased the government out of Windhoek - he called all his people to fight the government... Some of Impumbu's [sic] boys recently came from Grootfontein and told him that the British people were all leaving that place and sleeping in the bush as the Americans were close at hand. This sort of talk pleases Ipumbu very much.¹¹⁸

The source of these rumours was migrant workers influenced by the Garveyite movement in Luderitz.¹¹⁹ At this period there were rumours of uprising all over the south¹²⁰ and Ipumbu was more receptive than other Ovambo leaders to the potential of the situation. A symptom of the differentiated impact of these rumours of uprising was Martin ka Dikwa's decision in 1923 to break off relations with Ipumbu.¹²¹ This was at the same time as local rumours began circulating that the station in Ondonga would be burnt down.¹²²

Emmett suggests that millenarianism was a smokescreen for politics, its assertions part of 'psychological warfare' against colonial power.¹²³ More suggestive still is the argument that millenarianism deflected anti-colonial resistance away from internal organisation 'towards a hopeless dream of external intervention.'¹²⁴ In the Kwambi case, it may well have been a means of deflecting attention away from internal resistance.

¹¹⁷ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA (secret), 8.2.1923.

¹¹⁸ NAN RCO 3/1919, Hahn - NC SWA in Ovamboland, 28.1.1923.

¹¹⁹ Emmett, 'Popular Resistance,' pp 236-252; Gregory Pirio, 'The role of Garveyism in the making of Namibian nationalism,' in Wood (ed.), *Namibia*, pp 259-267; Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' p 4.

¹²⁰ Emmett, 'Popular Resistance,' p 224; Pirio, 'Role of Garveyism,' p 266.

¹²¹ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland, memorandum for NC SWA, 25.1.1923.

¹²² NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland, memorandum for NC SWA, 25.1.1923; RC Ovamboland, memorandum for NC SWA, 28.1.1923.

¹²³ Emmett, 'Popular Resistance', p 243.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p 251.

1923 passed without Ipumbu paying the cattle fine.¹²⁵ Oral sources describe Ipumbu's position:

He [Ipumbu] argued that the land belonged to him and that there was no way he could pay in his own land. Shongola [Hahn] is said to have asked the king to pay a certain amount of cattle or horses. The king then sent a message to Shongola asking him to whom belonged the cattle he was asked to pay, and told him that he did not have Shongola's cattle. Shongola sent another message that the cattle should be delivered. The king asked the messengers about who was looking after Shongola's cattle in Uukwambi and who gave birth to those cattle? 'What are their names before I give them?'¹²⁶

It is interesting to speculate as to why no military expedition materialised against Ipumbu in 1923. An important factor was the unfavourable international attention the Mandatory power received after the bombing of the Bondelswarts community in southern Namibia in 1922.¹²⁷ Officials on the ground had proposed a punitive expedition against Ipumbu in 1923, using predominantly black troops.¹²⁸ But mobilisation proved difficult and this expedition did not materialise.¹²⁹

But a military response of sorts was made. In April 1925 the Administrator took advantage of the presence of the Union Defence Force after the Rehoboth rebellion to send aeroplanes up to Ovamboland.¹³⁰ They gave:

flying, bombing and machine-gun demonstrations to the various tribes, with a view to impressing upon them the power of the

¹²⁵ NAN RCO 3/1919, Magistrate Grootfontein - Ipumbu, 5.7.1923; Ipumbu - Drew, 25.10.1923; Drew - Ipumbu, 21.9.1923; Drew - Ipumbu, 22.10.1923.

¹²⁶ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 181).

¹²⁷ Massive amounts of heavy bombs had been used to snuff out protests against taxation, which had culminated in groups of Bondelswarts taking to the hills after the return of the last remaining guerrilla leader of the 1907 uprising, Abraham Morris, from the Cape. Emmett, 'Popular resistance,' pp 235-6 and 250.

¹²⁸ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA (Secret), 8.2.1923.

¹²⁹ NAN RCO 3/1919, Hahn - NC SWA in Ovamboland, 28.1.1923.

¹³⁰ Tsumeb Museum, Ilse Schatz (ed.), Tsumeb zu OMEGs Zeiten (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), re 1923; Emmett, 'Popular resistance,' p 250.

'birds' of which they had heard but which they had never seen. Ipumbu's tribe was also visited.¹³¹

The first phase of the Ipumbu affair ended here in 1925. Ipumbu's subsequent attitude, 'very friendly indeed and in no single instance has there been the slightest friction',¹³² was in Hartmann's view the result of the crushing defeats of the Bondelswarts and Rehobothers, rather than any direct colonial impact on Ipumbu.¹³³ These defeats were also a setback for millenarianism. Ipumbu became more cautious in his dealings with colonialism, though it was also true that, despite the warning given by airplanes, Ipumbu had gone unpunished.

Uukwambi was kept under close official observation. In December 1925 one of Ipumbu's main headmen, Itamara, fled from Uukwambi to Kwanyama territory, later settling in Ondonga.¹³⁴ He was followed by a less important headman in March 1926.¹³⁵ The 'experienced and levelheaded'¹³⁶ Itamara had been forced to leave due to 'serious political differences' with Ipumbu over the missions.¹³⁷ After the Administrator's visit, Ipumbu branded Itamara a 'White Man's Spy'.¹³⁸ Officials argued that the loss of his 'big and influential headman has weakened him politically.'¹³⁹ His referral of one

¹³¹ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report April 1925.

¹³² Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1928, p 43.

¹³³ Hartmann, 'Rural struggles,' p 5.

¹³⁴ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report December 1925; OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report April 1926.

¹³⁵ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report March 1926.

¹³⁶ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1926.

¹³⁷ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report January 1926.

¹³⁸ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report April 1926.

¹³⁹ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report May 1926.

dispute to Ondangwa to settle in August 1926 was interpreted as a sign of a more co-operative attitude.¹⁴⁰

In June 1927 another Kwambi headman, Amporo, fled, leaving only Shitataru as the remaining important counsellor.¹⁴¹

Ipumbu is gradually surrounding himself with a set of young headmen. They certainly have not as yet gained in status and experience sufficiently to compare with their predecessors. Time alone will tell whether they will more successfully hold the reins of office under so severe a ruler as Ipumbu.¹⁴²

By October 1928 Shitataru had also fled from Uukwambi. This headman 'squatted' in Oukwanyama after leaving Uukwambi,¹⁴³ and was finally shifted to Ondonga.¹⁴⁴ Officials blamed Ipumbu's severity for the loss of his adherents:

Of the four ruling chiefs in Ovamboland he enjoys the most authority over his subjects and woe betide the man who refuses to obey an order or shows any disrespect. Because of this strict rule Ipumbu frequently loses people who prefer to reside in areas where the government is less stringent.¹⁴⁵

1930 did not pass without some minor display of Ipumbu's 'truculence.' He accused Hahn, the NC, of cheating him over the purchase of a car and spare parts.¹⁴⁶

The early 1930s showed an intersection of different issues which led to Ipumbu's final confrontation with colonialism. Anti-colonial and anti-mission

¹⁴⁰ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report August 1926.

¹⁴¹ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report June 1927.

¹⁴² NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report May 1927.

¹⁴³ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report October 1928.

¹⁴⁴ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1928.

¹⁴⁵ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1927.

¹⁴⁶ NAN NAO Vol 9, Eedes, re Chief Ipumbu's Car, 7.3.1930.

politics converged with gender politics. These require some preliminary thematic remarks. In the section on migrant labour to follow, chiefly control over the labour of young men will be touched on, as against the needs of their lineages and, specifically, Ipumbu's demands in this context. The necessity here is to examine a different level: the rights of Ovambo kings over young female labour and sexuality.

On the surface it would appear that royal rulers - Ipumbu notoriously so - had arrogated to themselves the right to send their men to settlements to bring back young women to provide various services, both domestic and sexual.¹⁴⁷ The latter fate was resisted. An oral informant who served Ipumbu at his *embala* recalled:

While at the palace, the king also used to send me to collect girls from the countryside... I used to go as far as Otshuulu and Ombuga for this purpose... you took the girl to a private entry behind the palace where girls always enter. Inside the *embala*, you would be expected to sit down for quite some time until the king arrived. It might happen that if you left the girl after bringing her there, she could escape from there and return home. It would be a good time to run and walk because it would be night.¹⁴⁸

In 1931 there were complaints of the sexual and other coercion of Christian female subjects. Very little of the larger picture emerges, especially as non-Christian women had no recourse to external authority, but when Ipumbu began seriously cutting into mission territory then political difficulties with colonialism arose. The first rumblings came when Ipumbu pressured Christian girls to go through *ohango*, the Kwambi equivalent of *efundula*. Four girls, who had been supported by the mission when they refused to participate in the *ohango*, were abducted and taken to Ipumbu's

¹⁴⁷ Tsumeb Museum, Ilse Schatz (ed.), Tsumeb zu OMEGs Zeiten (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), Kartsveld Gebiet p 138, Captain Ipumbu.

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 176-7)

residence. They escaped, one alleging that 'the chief would violate her.'¹⁴⁹ A total of nine girls finally took refuge in the mission station. Ipumbu sent armed men to intimidate the mission but the girls had been moved elsewhere. According to one oral version:

He [Ipumbu] wanted to give these ladies to some of his newly recruited headmen as their wives. The girls refused, saying they wanted to become Christians.¹⁵⁰

The Finnish missionary Alho believed that Ipumbu insisted on first privileges over all newly married women (*ius primae noctis*). He also alleged that Christians had been tortured, especially teachers.¹⁵¹

In December 1931 relations between Ipumbu and the mission became explosive. The matter involved Ipumbu's intentions towards a young woman called Nekulu ya Shivute. She was a baptismal candidate of the Elim mission and took refuge there.¹⁵² Her case was made more complex by the common knowledge that she was in fact Ipumbu's daughter. Thus it involved not only intended rape, but incest.¹⁵³ Nekulu had taken the name of her adoptive father, Shivute, as was the accepted practice where women had borne children to rulers who did not marry them.¹⁵⁴ In addition, Nekulu's mother was the sister of Ipumbu's principal wife, making Ipumbu the young woman's social as well as biological father.¹⁵⁵

After Nekulu's flight Ipumbu sent a contingent of about 200 armed men to search the mission. The resident missionary at Elim, Aho, refused

¹⁴⁹ NAN NAO Vol 9 5/2, Presiding missionary Alho - NC Ovamboland, n.d.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 178)

¹⁵¹ Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' p 7.

¹⁵² NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement Fikameni Ipumbu, 1.12.1932; Presiding Missionary Alho - NC Ovamboland, n.d.

¹⁵³ NAN Vol 9 File 5/2, Administrator SWA - NC Ovamboland, 3.3.1932.

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 178); NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, NC Ovamboland - Administrator SWA, 23.1.1932.

¹⁵⁵ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.6.1932; Statement Petrus N'djendja, 1.12.1932.

them entry.¹⁵⁶ Attempts to intimidate Aho by shooting into the air had little impact and Nekulu was smuggled out by car to Ongwediva.¹⁵⁷ Threats against the missionary and his family and the firing of guns did not cease until the NC Hahn arrived in Uukwambi on 3 January.¹⁵⁸ Nekulu, fearing for her life, categorically refused to return to Ipumbu's *embala* with her mother.¹⁵⁹

Ipumbu attempted to have Nekulu returned by the administration and to play off missionary and official tensions. The latter were very real. The affair at this and other points crystallised many of the objections officials harboured towards the Finnish missionaries. The Finns faced problems over Ipumbu's treatment of Christians,¹⁶⁰ but the administration was generally sensitive to how the spread of Christianity threatened Ovambo leaders, arguing that their '[p]olicy of feverish expansion frightens and antagonises ruling natives.'¹⁶¹ Ipumbu's personal view of the matter was revealing:

The missionaries are also to blame. They took Nekulu away from me. They have taken all my people. I have had much trouble with missionaries because they always tried to make me small.¹⁶²

It was only after a month that action was decided. The Administrator suggested a fine of 10 head of cattle.¹⁶³ This was intended to punish Ipumbu for incest ('even (sic) according to native custom, ... incestuous intercourse is

¹⁵⁶ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Presiding missionary Alho - NC Ovamboland, n.d.

¹⁵⁷ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 23.1.1932; Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' p 7.

¹⁵⁸ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Presiding missionary Alho - NC Ovamboland, n.d.

¹⁵⁹ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement Fikameni Ipumbu, 1.12.1932.

¹⁶⁰ Ipumbu had also at one point fired shots at some Finnish missionaries who tried to photograph the sacred grave of his predecessor, Negumbo. NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Administrator SWA - Presiding missionary Alho, 4.3.1932.

¹⁶¹ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.6.1932.

¹⁶² NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement by Ipumbu, ex-chief of Ukuambi, 1 October 1932. The Administrator for South West Africa in fact instructed the FMS to remove Aho from Uukwambi even before the whole affair had been resolved and Ipumbu deposed: Administrator SWA - Presiding missionary Alho, 4.3.1932.

¹⁶³ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.7.1932; Statement Fikameni Ipumbu, 1.12.1932.

regarded with abhorrence'),¹⁶⁴ for taking the law into his own hands by extending his authority over the missionaries, for abusing 'native law relating to sanctuary' and for freely using firearms. The NC believed there would be a repetition of the non-payment of the last fine.¹⁶⁵

In May 1932 the mission reported another case of rape by Ipumbu, again involving a Christian. This seems to have escalated the crisis. A further demand for the fine was made; when Ipumbu refused to pay, it was increased to fifty cattle. Ipumbu was warned that if he defaulted he would be forced into surrender and deposed from his position as king of Uukwambi.¹⁶⁶ By this time preparations for military action had already been set in motion by the Administrator.¹⁶⁷

The impact of aerial warfare against indigenous resistance, detailed elsewhere in SWA in this period by Emmett,¹⁶⁸ must not be underestimated. When matters came to a head in 1932, oral sources reveal that Ipumbu decided to abandon his *embala*, because while prepared to fight ground troops, militarily it was futile to fight an enemy who had aircraft and machine guns.¹⁶⁹ He had previously alleged that he was not afraid of aeroplanes, but in practice he had hidden himself when planes had appeared over Uukwambi in 1925.¹⁷⁰

The shaky military confidence of Kwambi fighters is reflected in this account by a Kwanyama participant in the attack on Ipumbu's *embala*:

No real battle took place. The Boers rounded us up to go and fight Ipumbu ya Tshilongo. We were moving in trucks. Planes were also sent to attack Ipumbu. The Kwambis adopted bad

¹⁶⁴ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Administrator SWA - NC Ovamboland, 3.3.1932.

¹⁶⁵ Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' p 7.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., pp 7-8; NAN NAO Vol 9 5/2, Alho - NC Ovamboland, 17.5.1932; Administrator SWA - Alho, 18.5.1932.

¹⁶⁷ NAN NAO Vol 9 5/2, Administrator SWA - Alho, 18.5.1932.

¹⁶⁸ Emmett, 'Popular resistance,' pp 249-52.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 180-1).

¹⁷⁰ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement by Petrus N'djendja, 1.12.1932; Statement Fikameni Ipumbu, 1.12.1932.

tactical warfare. They were just standing in front of Ipumbu's palace. When they saw planes (three) they ran away.¹⁷¹

Ipumbu fled in the direction of Ombandja and entered Angola,¹⁷² but on hearing that no-one had been killed at his *embala*, he made his way back across the border into Oukwanyama. He still resisted advice to surrender himself and was deserted by his last remaining followers. Prostrate with thirst, Ipumbu was found by some of the Kwanyama sent in pursuit of him by Hahn.¹⁷³ He was brought to Ondangwa and, now deposed as king, went into supervised exile in the Kavango region.¹⁷⁴

As in Oukwanyama, the levelling of an insubordinate king was followed by the establishment of a council of headmen.¹⁷⁵ The political restructuring was in response to a particular crisis of 1932. But this was underlined by conflicts which had emerged between external structures and the Kwanyama kingship over the control of young male labour, female sexuality and Christian subjects. But expansion of settlement had been the issue which first brought Ipumbu into conflict with the administration in 1923, an issue which grew more pressing in Ovamboland in the late 1920s.

The boundary demarcation and its implications

A sense of physical, spatial and political compression emerges from the implementation of the boundary agreement between South Africa and Portugal in the late 1920s. Direct effects such as the siting of homesteads and

¹⁷¹ Interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 114).

¹⁷² NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement by Fikameni Ipumbu, 1.12.1932

¹⁷³ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement by Fikameni Ipumbu, 1.12.1932; interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 114).

¹⁷⁴ NAN NAO Vol 9 File 5/2, Statement by Ipumbu, 1.10.1932.

¹⁷⁵ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report 1934*, p 51.

fields were felt mainly by the Kwanyama,¹⁷⁶ but also the Mbalantu and smaller western polities. Additionally, the Ndonga stood to lose their north-eastern cattle posts and were forced to move their herds far to the west.¹⁷⁷ Amongst the longer term indirect results were, firstly, pressure on the colonial administration to open up new settlement space to the east, and, secondly, further erosion of ecological controls previously exercised by Kwanyama kings.

The background to the demarcation began with negotiations in 1920.¹⁷⁸ As already mentioned, the location hinged on the definition of the cataract in the original treaty. Two issues preoccupied the negotiators: the boundary demarcation between Angola and SWA and the use of Kunene water resources. Both SA and Portugal were eager to acquire access to the biggest cataract - 'the bone of contention'¹⁷⁹ - which had power and irrigation potential of great significance in the long term. These were finally agreed in favour of Portugal. A third issue concerning equal access to the Kunene at the Ruacana cataract was questioned by the Portuguese. The SWA-Angola Boundary Commission was established to finalise negotiations. Agreement between the Union Government and Portugal over the actual boundary was reached on 22 June 1926.¹⁸⁰ The use of the Kunene water 'for the purposes of generating hydraulic power and the inundation and irrigation of SWA' was agreed on 1 July 1926.¹⁸¹ However, stock watering rights for residents of SWA who had previously enjoyed access to the Kunene River remained undecided well into the 1930s and beyond.

¹⁷⁶ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report July 1927.

¹⁷⁷ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report October 1927.

¹⁷⁸ The geo-political technicalities behind the demarcation of the Angola-South West Africa boundary are beyond the scope of this chapter. See Sakeus Akweenda, 'International law and the protection of Namibia's territorial integrity: boundaries and territorial claims,' (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 1989), Chapter VI.

¹⁷⁹ NAN RCO 10/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1916.

¹⁸⁰ Akweenda, 'International law,' p 404.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

For those Kwanyama in the Neutral Zone, which now fell in Portuguese territory, the decision as to whether to remain in Angola or move south over the border was dictated by specific conditions offered by either side. The South West African side of the boundary offered relative stability, no taxation until 1929, no military presence and a large labour market in its Police Zone. However, land for new or expanding settlement was relatively scarce. Grazing was also restricted except at some distance from central settlements.

On the Portuguese side by contrast, there were large tracts of comparatively underpopulated country, with better water and grazing conditions.¹⁸² Unlike in SWA considerable freedom of trade existed which included commodities such as liquor.¹⁸³ But the wage-labour market was smaller and pay almost always lower.¹⁸⁴ The disadvantages of Portuguese colonial rule were numerous. Hut tax was imposed after the occupation of Oukwanyama, military service and a forced labour regime implemented.¹⁸⁵ This required a considerable military presence. For any Kwanyama headman weighing up the relative advantages of remaining under Portuguese rule or shifting south, a crucial consideration would be not only whether he could safeguard his own interests, but also offer his followers protection against Portuguese administration and the soldiery entrusted to round up forced labour for highland plantations. If his adherents worked in SWA, he would have to consider whether he could safeguard their gains from migrant labour. For the salaries earned from migrant labour in SWA would be a key source of

¹⁸² Interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 76).

¹⁸³ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - OC NA Ovamboland, Monthly Report May 1928.

¹⁸⁴ Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 107.

¹⁸⁵ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1927; interview with Vilho Kaulinge, Ondobe, 30.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 76);

interview with Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 93);

interview with Josua Hamamudibo, Ondobe, 17.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 112);

interview with Olavi Twamoneni, Okalongo, 29.12.1989; Clarence-Smith and Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment', p 105.

income for the Portuguese state in the relatively stagnant economy of southern Angola.¹⁸⁶

The Ovambo distinctly preferred administrative conditions under South African rule, as the Portuguese head of the Boundary Commission, Machado, acknowledged.

Since the beginning of our occupation, a policy has been adopted towards the Kwanyama which is very different from one of attraction, which our neighbours' mode of operation would have recommended us to follow. We have not come up with anything better than the penal code and the civil code, with all the repressive laws of a rigid, unpopular and odious policy, [a system of] justice and administration which the natives do not understand.¹⁸⁷

Oral history is vehement on the subject of Portuguese rule. Forced labour, contrasting directly with wage labour in SWA, is a bitter collective memory.¹⁸⁸

Essentially, the choice was between more favourable ecological conditions as opposed to more favourable administrative conditions. Ecology tended to tip the balance. This was apparent from the two trends of movement firstly in the mid-1920s, which favoured the south, and another series of shifts after 1928, which favoured the north. Both moves hinged on the state of the crops and availability of grazing.

In the mid-1920s Portuguese began preparations for taking over the Neutral Zone. SWA officials noted

the construction of special motor roads and mention of their intention to erect a further telephone line. They at one time went so far as to collect tax or tribute from the natives living in the zone...¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 98.

¹⁸⁷ Carlos Roma Machado, 'A Região Cuamato-Cuanhama', *Boletim AGC*, No 19 1927, p 78.

¹⁸⁸ Interview with Sheetekela and Lucas Dama, Okalongo, 27.12.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 200-1); interview with Simpson Ndatipo, Onakayale, 3.11.1989; interview with Olavi Twamoneni, Okalongo, 29.12.1989.

¹⁸⁹ PRO FO 371/11090. Minister's Minute No. 120, J.B.M. Hertzog, 13.2.1925.

The frontier was always sensitive and these activities sparked off disruption. In mid-1925 after a very good harvest, several headmen left the Neutral Zone and were allotted sites in SWA territory.¹⁹⁰ Early the next year more were expected.¹⁹¹ These shifts were substantial; headmen drew their adherents and stock with them. In August 1926 Hahn began discussions with his Portuguese counterpart concerning those Kwanyama presently in the Neutral Zone who wished to move south when the Zone was actually handed over to Portugal.¹⁹² In early 1927, several headmen had already moved, though most intended to delay their move south until they had harvested the season's crops.¹⁹³ By this time the decision had been reached to settle immigrants from Angola in the east of Oukwanyama, towards Kavango, as immigration over the previous years had led to overcrowding and more was expected. 'As soon as we notify them we have lost the Neutral Zone, there will be a general exodus.'¹⁹⁴ By May the UG Representative stated that no headmen of importance were left in the Zone.¹⁹⁵

Kwanyama headmen were not the only agents wishing to remove themselves from the Portuguese orbit. One Ndombondola headmen, Hero, informed the administration he intended moving into Ombalantu in SWA after reaping his crops and was promised a suitable site.¹⁹⁶ Political interventions by Portuguese in Ombandja in 1928 also had repercussions for cross-border migration. Many Mbandja immigrants from Angola were

¹⁹⁰ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report June 1925.

¹⁹¹ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - NC Windhoek, Monthly Report February 1926.

¹⁹² NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report August 1926.

¹⁹³ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1927.

¹⁹⁴ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report February 1927.

¹⁹⁵ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, UG Representative Namakunde - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 31.5.1927.

¹⁹⁶ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report February 1927.

expected to join the resettled SWA Mbandja community under Sheetekela¹⁹⁷ in Okalongo after reaping their crops in mid-1928.¹⁹⁸ Discontent had been aroused in this area by the Portuguese appointment of a non-royal, Kambungu, as chief of Ombandja.

By October 1928 the team of surveyors contracted to mark out the beacons and clear the boundary line had reached Oukwanyama.

Ukuanyama natives are much concerned and have become somewhat unsettled because of the survey operations on the border and the fact that they now have visible signs of the Zone's becoming Portuguese territory...

[N]atives were evincing much concern as to what would be their ultimate place of residence and it was frequently necessary for him [Eedes] to arrange for the shifting of kraals and establishing of new areas for people moving across.¹⁹⁹

At this juncture there were signs of a Portuguese 'policy of attraction.' An incentive to Kwanyama headmen to settle in Portuguese territory came with a new ruling in May 1928 which allowed the carrying of arms, if licensed.²⁰⁰ A considerable coup came in 1927 when one of Mandume's nieces, Kalinasha, moved over the border with her husband Haimbili.²⁰¹ Haimbili had allegedly been offered a large headmanship to persuade his royal wife to return.²⁰² When Kalinasha had left Angola three years previously²⁰³ her cattle had been seized, about which a complaint had been referred to the Portuguese Consul in South Africa.²⁰⁴ Kalinasha's sister Delekerwa, who had

¹⁹⁷ NAN NAO 16 10/2, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 7.3.1929.

¹⁹⁸ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report April 1928.

¹⁹⁹ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report October 1927.

²⁰⁰ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report May 1928.

²⁰¹ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, NA Namakunde - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 31.10.1927.

²⁰² NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, NA Namakunde - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 12.10.1927.

²⁰³ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - NC Windhoek, 9.1.1925.

²⁰⁴ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 3.10.1927.

left Angola seven years previously, reportedly expressed initial surprise that she should return to 'a country where she had had nothing but trouble and unfair treatment.'²⁰⁵ But despite these protestations, Delekerwa herself crossed back into Angola early in September 1928. Her own uncertainty about the move was suggested by the lack of property or sizeable following she took with her.²⁰⁶

Wider forces had begun to operate which influenced migration into Angola and may well explain Delekerwa's move. The impact of new ecological pressures on the country undermined the complacency of South African officials as to what the SWA side could offer the Kwanyama. The drought which started in 1928 and the looming famine of 1929-30 were effectively what pushed many Kwanyama to cross over to the north.

The water question has become acute and stock is in bad condition... Many natives in Ukuanyama have moved over into Angola and more are still doing so... It is most unfortunate that a bad season should have made the contrast between conditions in this country and those prevailing in Angola so striking at this time.²⁰⁷

Expansion south or west on the SWA side was prevented by friction over land and watering points by similarly expanding Kwambi and Ndonga neighbours.²⁰⁸ This shook the administration somewhat, as they had delayed resolving these internal boundary disputes until the potential for conflict had become very serious. The only alternative for Kwanyama householders along the cramped border area in the short-term stringent drought conditions was

²⁰⁵ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report October 1927.

²⁰⁶ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 3.9.1928.

²⁰⁷ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.10.1928.

²⁰⁸ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Reports June and July 1927.

to move into Angola. The only headman for whom provision could properly be made to move south into SWA was Hamkoto wa Kapa.²⁰⁹

[T]he natives feel more than before that they are being cramped into country which is much more unsuitable and less fertile for settlement than that occupied by their kith and kin in Angola.²¹⁰

Portugal's 'policy of attraction' caused some soul-searching among her Union counterparts.²¹¹ Poor hospitality towards minor headmen during the Administrator's visit to Ovamboland in 1928 was cited as a reason for several small headmen moving into Angola, where, the latter claimed, liquor was proffered more liberally and not only to the biggest headmen.²¹² The Portuguese move which aroused the greatest envy and chagrin, however, was invitation by the official in charge of Ondjiva, Correio, to Kwanyama headmen who had lately moved over into Angola to an 'educational tour' in Lubango, the provincial capital. Besides sleeping in European beds and having their meals at the same table as the Portuguese, noted Eedes,

[t]hese headmen will also be shown the Government Veterinary Establishment near Lubango and generally be entertained by the Portuguese Governor, no doubt with a view to them informing their friends on the British side of the border what a magnificent and progressive race the Portuguese are.²¹³

He added, without the slightest trace of self-irony, 'I think that something of this sort should be done by the Administration of South West Africa.'²¹⁴

²⁰⁹ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report August 1928.

²¹⁰ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report September 1927.

²¹¹ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report September 1927.

²¹² NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report August 1928.

²¹³ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, Monthly Report October 1928.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

What had not been predicted was how the Kwanyama outflow would affect the supply of migrant labour. A drop in numbers in 1928 prompted officials to argue for the need for urgent action over the settling of Kwanyama-Ndonga²¹⁵ and Kwanyama-Kwambi border disputes.

[I]f the whole question of the borders of this area is not settled immediately trouble will occur, and I have no doubt that some of the headmen will move over into Angola where they are certain of obtaining sufficient country for their needs. In previous years about 50% of the labour supply came from this tribe and the present slump is only due to the uncertain state of affairs existing here in regard to the Ovakuanyama tribal borders.²¹⁶

The colonial boundary demarcation process caused pressure to build up on Oukwanyama's southern boundaries, but it also fed into a series of complex related problems. Precisely how colonial rule affected aspects of social organisation such as settlement of new areas and ecological controls like tree-felling for example requires much further research, as does the implementation of colonial conservation measures. The replacement of kingship in Oukwanyama with headmen certainly removed former ideological elements from such controls.

It would be too simplistic however to blame colonialism alone for the erosion of conservation practices. Such arguments do come out in oral history,²¹⁷ but what exactly is to be made of them is a question requiring caution. There is an element of the normative in them, a reconstruction of an old dominant discourse on centralised kingship for anti-colonial purposes.

²¹⁵ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report November 1926.

²¹⁶ NAN NAO 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Namakunde - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 5.9.1928.

²¹⁷ Interview with Titus Iita, Onakayale, 3.11.1989.

Migrant labour, 1916-29

Between 1916 and 1929 there was less migrant labour than in earlier and later periods. Although labour migration became large-scale and systematised under the colonial system, leading Ruth First to argue that 'In Ovamboland... government is of the people, by government officials, for the labour recruiter',²¹⁸ in the first decade of colonial occupation it was quite the opposite.

Previously unused figures from the Ovamboland administration suggest the following trends after occupation. Firstly, very large numbers sought work in the south in the famine and immediate post-famine period. In Karibib alone in early 1916 there were over 5,000 surplus Ovambo workers, causing the local magistrate to forward instructions to officials in Ovamboland not to allow any further migrants to come south.²¹⁹ But the migration rate after the famine dropped, settling into a rate well below pre-1915 levels. Between October 1916 and November 1917 the RC registered 3,168 workers to the south,²²⁰ beyond the first three months of 1918 where 2,000 workers migrated,²²¹ detailed statistics are difficult to glean. Annual totals for 1920, 1921 and 1922 were 7,000, 4,000 and 3,000 respectively.²²² These rates prior to the 1930s nowhere returned to their pre-war average level of 10,000 per annum. Annual fluctuation occurred, but rates remained insufficient to meet the needs of the economy in the south in this period. These figures are of course for SWA: further research needs to explore levels of Ovambo migrant labour within the Angolan economy. These are unlikely

²¹⁸ Ruth First, *South West Africa* (Harmondsworth, 1963), p 125.

²¹⁹ NAN RCO 2/1916/3, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 7.2.1916.

²²⁰ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 1.12.1917; Hahn - RC Ovamboland, 25.9.1917.

²²¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.4.1918.

²²² Gordon, 'Variations', p 265; his figures are based on Union of South Africa, *Annual Reports 1920-22*.

to have been higher than the figures recorded for pre-war years, which probably did not exceed an annual 2,000.²²³

Given that the state had no previous direct presence in Ovamboland, it is tempting to assume it had an impact on the labour flow, but in reality its influence was limited:

Labour supply here as well as in the Union, fluctuates considerably according to the season of year, crops, native inclination, etc. and is hardly affected by the question as to whether there is a shortage or surplus at labour centres.²²⁴

Underlying socio-economic relations between migrants, lineage seniors and political leaders, intersecting with ecological pressures, induced an increase in labour migration or its contraction. These were areas over which the state had very little control, especially in the first fifteen years of colonial presence.²²⁵

Shortfall in numbers was exacerbated by the migrants' autonomy in the timing of their departure south. Colonial officials attempting to spur recruitment were dependent on the fate of the crops and the cycle of pastoral activity. For example, in late 1916 and early 1917, the RC advised Windhoek that:

the population was now actively preparing the fields, and the men are reluctant to leave until these are established.²²⁶

In January 1917, Tsumeb found it impossible to obtain labour. Despite 'acute labour needs in the mines,' which had made a demand for 1,400 labourers in March 1917,²²⁷ the bulk of the potential labour migrants were unlikely to leave 'until the marula drinking and harvest were over.'²²⁸ 1917 as a whole was

²²³ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 79; Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 70.

²²⁴ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1918.

²²⁵ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1918.

²²⁶ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.11.1916.

²²⁷ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 6.3.1917.

²²⁸ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Manning - Secretary Protectorate, 28.3.1917.

unsatisfactory. Again in mid-1918, the RC warned Windhoek that until mid-August:

a considerable proportion of young unmarried men, who make up the majority of labourers from this country, will remain in Ovamboland for the customary bringing of cattle to the fields preparatory to being sent to distant outposts for the dry months.²²⁹

Inadequate recruitment in the specific period just after colonial occupation was due to factors inextricably tied up with post-famine recovery. Reconstruction of cattle herds in particular required the labour of young men; herds were split into small units and sent off to the Oshimpolo outposts, each requiring two herders.²³⁰ Agricultural cultivation, especially until the harvest of 1917, also tied down labour to the homestead. Accompanying this were ideologically unifying mechanisms such as *efundula*.²³¹ All these factors were important in preventing the labour of young men from leaving Ovamboland. Moorsom rightly argues that this was a period of consolidation of lineage social relations.²³² This has particular resonance in the case of Oukwanyama, whose centralised royal authority had devolved on to headmen. Even the active recruitment by kings or headmen was likely to have had little impact against the requirements of production centred around homesteads in this period of reconstruction.

Most migrants were young, unmarried men.

[O]lder married men live in separate single kraals and not together with other families in villages which is the custom amongst many Union tribes. The married Ovambo therefore finds it difficult to arrange to leave his home and stock for any lengthy period.²³³

²²⁹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.7.1918.

²³⁰ For this trend see NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1928.

²³¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.7.1918.

²³² Moorsom, 'Formation,' p 89.

²³³ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 27.3.1918.

Another group of migrants had emerged around the time of the famine: these were very young boys, barely adolescent. Mines rejected them when they appeared among batches from Ovamboland, but at several points the administration allowed them to proceed south to engage in farm labour.²³⁴ This very youthful migration was a new feature for Ovamboland and suggested a weakening of social control over youths. It had implications for the later transformation of contract labour into a highly regular pattern in the lives of Ovambo men, for these youths became conditioned to the system from an early age.

Initial labour recruitment policy relied on the persuasion of collaborative Ovambo leaders.²³⁵ In 1918 colonial policy towards headmen who actively recruited for the administration was laid out. The original proposal had been to award headmen a fee for each migrant recruited,²³⁶ but Manning recommended that this money should be used instead for feeding the migrant as he walked south.²³⁷ The RC argued that a system of quasi-tribute already operated; migrants would far more readily offer headmen 'gifts' on their return than if part of their wages had been used to pay headmen a recruiting fee.²³⁸

In Ondonga certainly the *pandulo* system operated as in the pre-colonial period. Evidence from Uukwambi suggests that in the 1920s a large cut of the wages or goods was extracted by Ipumbu.²³⁹ Such levies were detrimental to matrilineal kin who benefited from migrant earnings. Migrants

²³⁴ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 25.6.1918; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 27.3.1918; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1918.

²³⁵ NAN RCO 10/1919/8, Memorandum of meeting with Ovakuanyama headmen and Major Fairlie, 7.12.1917.

²³⁶ NAN RCO 15/1916/1, Fairlie, Report on the Situation in the Ovakonyama country as developed by Recent Military Action, 25.3.1917.

²³⁷ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 25.2.1918.

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ NAN RCO 3/1919, Missionary Tylvas - RC Ovamboland, 3.8.1922.

who had been to the diamond fields were targeted in particular. One oral source alleged that migrants were obliged to pay Ipumbu £1 upon their return to Uukwambi. Clothing and knives were also required as 'gifts.' Ipumbu's attendants were strict about collecting this:

In case you said you did not have them, they would follow you and get something from you at home. This happened especially to those who were known by person.²⁴⁰

Ipumbu's extraction of 'gifts' in order to purchase various items (including a car) must be viewed in the context of his own centralising and anti-colonial grip over Uukwambi. He had his own agenda which was not necessarily representative of a systematic surplus appropriation occurring across Ovamboland. During periods of political tension Ipumbu actually suspended migrants from leaving to work in the south.²⁴¹ This was noticed by the RC; lack of Kwambi migrant labour became one of the Administration's grievances against Ipumbu.²⁴²

Despite Ipumbu's ban, however, young Kwambi men continued to leave clandestinely to work in the south. They did so with the support of their kin.

I had already asked my parents to prepare enough food for us. We were worried about food, because at the palace you could hardly get anything to eat unless you went to the neighbourhood to ask for it. So we made our plan and during the night we went past our house, got our food which they had prepared for us and off we walked to Ondangwa.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 161-2).

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp 175-6.

²⁴² NAN RCO 3/1919, NC SWA - Secretary SWA, 6.1.1922.

²⁴³ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 161).

At times of greatest political tension and in expectation of attack, Ipumbu did provide meat for his military contingents,²⁴⁴ but this was not the norm. The dynamic of attaching and controlling young men's labour is suggested in this oral history:

The king prohibited people from going to work in the south because he needed them at his palace to serve him. Some of us were made to become his soldiers... If we had not escaped from his palace, we could have stayed there for quite a long time. After finishing our contract we returned to the palace. Although the king was annoyed by our escape he did not punish us. We were only ordered to stay at the palace. The only job we were given to do was to work on the king's small grain field. Any time we went for church service, we were immediately told to go and work in the king's field. I used to be the head of the others and whenever the king came to us he referred to me as a vagabond. He said that I always wanted to escape and that I did not want to carry his gun.²⁴⁵

Arms, necessary for resistance, were also a means of attaching young male subjects and encouraged Ipumbu's involvement in illegal trade. His organisation of ivory hunting was almost certainly to acquire exchange items for the contraband arms trade.²⁴⁶ Hahn's intelligence sources, mainly Kwambi exiles, reported that Ipumbu purchased weapons from illegal German traders in Outjo.²⁴⁷ When the dividends from migrant labourers' wages were no longer available, few other means of accumulation were open to the Kwambi leader.

The contract workers themselves occupied two worlds during such periods of tension: firstly that of workers in the colonial economy, secondly that of young men in a social formation that pre-dated colonialism, whose labour was required for military resistance against the state which was contracting their labour out of Ovamboland. When they imported millenarian

²⁴⁴ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland, Memorandum for NC SWA, 25.1.1923.

²⁴⁵ Interview with Aromas Ashipala, Jason Ambole, Petrus Eelu, Vilho Tshilongo and Jason Amakutuwa, Elim, 25.9.1989 (Appendix 7, p 176).

²⁴⁶ NAN RCO 3/1919, RC Ovamboland, Memorandum for NC SWA, 25.1.1923.

²⁴⁷ NAN RCO 3/1919, Statement Festus, 28.12.1922.

ideas into rural Ovamboland in the early 1920s,²⁴⁸ these two worlds overlapped.

Conditions for migrant labour in Uukwambi were not universal. It remains difficult generally in Ovamboland to quantify the exact proportion of wages which accrued to headmen and kings. Lebzelter assessed the average expenditure pattern of Ovambo migrants for the late 1920s as follows: out of an annual wage of R60, fully one third was spent on 'purchases' and a further R8.10 at the mine store by then established in Ovambo. Aside from 'taxation' or 'gifts' to leaders, much of the remainder went on the workers' own reproduction costs.²⁴⁹ Moorsom summarises the principle objectives of migration as twofold: first, migrants wished to acquire items of exchange for means of production, especially those younger men who aimed to establish homesteads; secondly, there was ideologically determined consumption, fulfilling household, prestige or religious needs.²⁵⁰

The greatest importance must be attached to the migrant's efforts to obtain cattle. The latter contributed to the matrilineal herds and facilitated marriage. Ovambo bridewealth payment was distinct from that of other southern African societies supplying migrants. Commercialisation and inflation of bridewealth, as happened in patrilineal societies such as Harries describes for the Tsonga in Mozambique, were not the case with the Ovambo.²⁵¹ Slowness in the commercialisation of bridewealth seems to have been consistent among matrilineal societies. Even the pressures on the matrilineal inheritance system which have characterised other central African societies entering the capitalist labour market were relatively delayed in Ovamboland. The plough, a resource of central importance in pressurising

²⁴⁸ Emmett, 'Popular resistance,' pp 241-3; Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles', p 4.

²⁴⁹ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen*, p 219. The monetary conversions are Moorsom's; see Moorsom, 'Formation,' p 90.

²⁵⁰ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 90.

²⁵¹ Patrick Harries, 'Kinship, ideology and the nature of pre-colonial labour migration: labour migration from the Delagoa Bay hinterland to South Africa, up to 1895', in Marks and Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation*, pp 151-2.

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matrilineal inheritance norms to shift towards direct father-son descent, was introduced relatively late in Ovamboland and not in widespread use before the 1940s.²⁵² This was probably one factor in capitalism's relatively slow impact on bridewealth and matrilineal inheritance patterns in Ovamboland.²⁵³

The question of cattle accumulation in Ovamboland raises fundamental contrasts with the Herero further south. Among the Herero, argues Werner, pastoralism was a form of self-peasantisation energetically pursued as a means of avoiding wage labour.²⁵⁴ The Ovambo had no access to external markets to exchange cattle or dairy products. No traders were allowed into Ovamboland; the only exchange which could take place was through cash purchase of goods at the SWANLA store when this was established in the late 1920s.²⁵⁵ Commodity exchange took place internally and in kind. Moreover, the absence of taxation and grazing fees did not place pressure on the Ovambo to intensify commodity production, which it did in the Herero case.²⁵⁶ Nor did the Ovambo experience the same land pressures. Their experience of peripheral integration into capitalism operating in the central territory of SWA made the terms on which they responded to the pressures and demands of the colonial economy very different.

For the colonial administration in Ovamboland, the period 1915-21 showed dependency on existing mechanisms of labour organisation. After the mandate, efforts were made to tighten procedures and recruitment, but until the mid-1920s labour control was still tenuous. South African officials commented unfavourably on the weak influence the Germans had established

²⁵² NAN NAO Vol 11 5/7/2, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 31.12.1938; OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 19.9.1939; interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Olukonda, 15.11.1989. This last source stated that only by the 1950s were there 'many ploughs.'

²⁵³ See Holy, *Strategies and Norms*, pp 78-87.

²⁵⁴ Wolfgang Werner, 'Economic and Social History', pp 107-9; idem, 'Struggles in the Namibian countryside, 1915-50: some preliminary notes', pp 273-7.

²⁵⁵ NAN NAO Vol 19 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1927.

²⁵⁶ Werner, 'Struggles', pp 272-5.

over the Ovambo,²⁵⁷ and initially depended on collaborative headmen²⁵⁸ and missionaries²⁵⁹ for recruitment. Moreover, the German labour system had provided no infrastructure for the movement of labour from the north to the Police Zone. Plans for the construction of a railway line between Otavi and Ondonga had been halted by the outbreak of hostilities in 1915,²⁶⁰ never to be resumed by the South Africans. These were the fragile residues of the German labour system over which a handful of Union officials now presided.

From 1915-16, officials tried to encourage migrant labour to follow the route from Ondangwa to Namutoni, and from there to Tsumeb.²⁶¹ This was to systematise the labour route south and to service Tsumeb's own labour needs. The aim was to cut the route through Okaukweyo and Outjo. Water and food were made available at Namutoni and on arrival at Tsumeb,²⁶² demonstrably necessary during and immediately after the famine. Vast distances between these points remained a discouragement. The seven-day journey by foot from Ondangwa to Tsumeb was almost waterless; wild animals remained a real danger.²⁶³

Labour's preference was to avoid Tsumeb and head for the magistracy of Karibib.²⁶⁴ A probable powerful incentive was that from Karibib they could be directed to the southern mines, rather than the northern mines or farms

²⁵⁷ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Acting NC Windhoek - Military Magistrates, 2.4.1918.

²⁵⁸ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.4.1917.

²⁵⁹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - all missionaries in Ovamboland, 6.10.1916.

²⁶⁰ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, British Consulate Luderitzbucht - ?, 14.2.1913.

²⁶¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 12.2.1918; RC Ovamboland - NC Windhoek, 19.1.1916.

²⁶² NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 12.2.1918; RC Ovamboland - NC Windhoek, 19.1.1916; Military Magistrate Tsumeb - Hahn, 1.8.1917; Military Magistrate Tsumeb - Secretary Protectorate, 30.4.1918; Military Magistrate Tsumeb - Secretary Protectorate, 3.6.1918; RCO 10/1919/8, Memorandum of meeting with Ovakuanyama headmen and UG Representative, 7.12.1917.

²⁶³ Interview with Petrus Ndongo, Odibo, 23.11.1989; interview with Konis Imene and Aune Shaningwa, Onampadhi, 4.11.1989.

²⁶⁴ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Military Magistrate Tsumeb - RC Ovamboland, 29.1.1918; NC Windhoek - RC Ovamboland, 18.1.1916; RCO 2/1917/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 26.3.1918; OC NA Windhoek - OC NA Ovamboland, 7.12.1915.

near Tsumeb.²⁶⁵ This was only one example of early methods of avoiding controlling mechanisms. There was also a general reluctance by Ovambo migrants to submit themselves for registration in recruitment centres, just as there was reluctance to carry passes.²⁶⁶ Angolan labourers not only avoided registration at Namakunde,²⁶⁷ but changed their names at the registration centre in Ondangwa to avoid detection of their origins. This was especially the case when Portuguese tried to impose restrictions against allowing Angolan labour to migrate to SWA.²⁶⁸ Given the extremely long lines of administrative communication between Ovamboland and the labour centres in SWA, it was not surprising great loopholes existed to be exploited.

By 1918 the necessity for enforcing systematisation by the colonial administration was being urged. The movement of labour was 'too independent.' A new system of identification was proposed, using metal disks (*odalate*) rather than paper I.D.²⁶⁹ In the state's position of relative weakness, officials laid blame for aberrant Ovambo behaviour on their experience under German masters.

The giving of wrong names and addresses is, I've been told by Chief Martin, and other influential Ovambos, done to avoid arrest for breach of law or contract and was largely practised by Ovambo labourers during the late German Regime.²⁷⁰

²⁶⁵ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Military Magistrate Tsumeb - Secretary Protectorate, 13.1.1917; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 24.2.1917.

²⁶⁶ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 1.1.1917; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 3.3.1917; RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 30.1.1918.

²⁶⁷ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 8.1.1918.

²⁶⁸ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, UG Representative Namakunde - RC Ovamboland, 6.1.1917.

²⁶⁹ This system of metal identity tags had been used by the Germans before being resumed by the South Africans. According to Zhu Mbako, this I.D. was worn on a wire necklace by workers on taking up contracts; the Ovambo term for this is the same term used for contract: *odalate*. Mbako, 'Development of labour', p 56.

²⁷⁰ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 24.9.1917.

The point to emphasise however is that despite reports by headmen that 'people never complained of the harsh usage which formerly existed',²⁷¹ migrants continued to practise evasions under South African rule. It reflected an ongoing struggle to obtain the highest price for their labour outside Ovamboland.

It cannot be categorically stated what kind of 'market intelligence system' the Ovambo and other northern migrants operated.²⁷² The preferred goal of labour was the diamond fields near Luderitz. Great efforts were normally made to avoid the northern mines, especially Tsumeb. Greatest efforts went into avoiding farm labour. Like the constant flow of information about the Rhodesian labour market to the rural hinterlands of central Africa,²⁷³ reports by returning Ovambo workers affected the next wave of outgoing migrants. This intelligence influenced choice of work-place by Ovambo migrants and whether they would migrate at all that season.²⁷⁴ As an information system it facilitated other well-disseminated methods of beating the system.

Fragility of colonial recruiting efforts was revealed in local officials' advice on maltreatment and the turning away of unsuitable labour. There is even a suggestion of 'liberalism', though it was instrumentalist and stemmed from a weak position. This is illustrated in the recommendations made by Manning to labour centres in the south not to turn away over-youthful²⁷⁵ or unhealthy migrants. These, if refused, might jeopardise the larger flow of labour by spreading word of their rejection.²⁷⁶ 'Bad work' forced on Ovambo migrants acted as one disincentive for prospective migrants who might follow them south. The return on one occasion of discontented Ovambo, who had

²⁷¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 8.1.1918.

²⁷² Charles van Onselen, *Chibaro. African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia 1900-1933* (Johannesburg, 1980), p 234.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1918.

²⁷⁵ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 25.6.1918.

²⁷⁶ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 27.3.1918.

received only one third of wages promised and been fed only in Tsumeb, made the RC predict this would 'undoubtedly have a bad effect on intending labourers.'²⁷⁷ The problem was serious enough to warrant the RC's hearing of all cases of alleged underpayment.²⁷⁸

Manning advised against efforts to break down the group formations which Ovambo migrants preferred, both during their journeys and at the workplace.²⁷⁹ 'The consensus of feeling is against being split up or sent to farms.'²⁸⁰ Thus Native Affairs staff tended to support Ovambo preference not only for gang work, but also against farm labour.²⁸¹ The administration's prioritisation of mining labour requirements over farming in this period worked in favour of Ovambo labour. This preference was only reversed in the late 1920s when depression struck the mining industry, from which time labour was increasingly directed towards farms.²⁸² The only period when the Ovambo ability to maintain migrating groups was eroded was during the famine. Many groups had split up to find work on farms. After 1915-6 the dispersal of groups was unusual. Manning was obliged to accept that under normal conditions they were better kept together. The RC accepted the methods of the Rand compound system which kept migrants in their 'ethnic' groups.²⁸³

For the Ovambo administration the problems of labour control and shortage remained chronic. The greatest check to labour flow appeared in October 1918; all recruitment was halted as Spanish influenza took grip in the

²⁷⁷ NAN RCO 2/1917/1a, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 13.4.1917.

²⁷⁸ NAN RCO 2/1918/10, RC Ovamboland - Military Magistrate Tsumeb, 19.2.1918; RCO 2/1917/2, OC Native Affairs Luderitzbucht - OC Native Affairs Windhoek, 14.4.1917; NAN RCO 2/1917/2, OC Native Affairs Windhoek - OC Native Affairs Luderitzbucht, 16.4.1917.

²⁷⁹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Acting NC Windhoek - OC NA Ovamboland, 8.11.1915.

²⁸⁰ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 20.3.1918.

²⁸¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 10.4.1918; Military Magistrate Tsumeb - RC Ovamboland, 3.5.1918.

²⁸² Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism,' p 318.

²⁸³ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 22.1.1918.

territory.²⁸⁴ A similar epidemic disrupted the labour flow in 1925.²⁸⁵ Working conditions at the actual labour centres - the core grievances of labour relations - also affected recruitment.

The natives of Oukwanyama are unwilling to proceed south to work on the diamond fields as they consider the present contract far too long a period and the present rate of wages too low.²⁸⁶

Strikes affected recruitment; for example, the August 1925 strike in Otavi reduced the labour flow to a trickle. Returning workers stopped outgoing recruits in this case by telling them no work was available in the south.²⁸⁷ Further migrant ploys included the use of visiting passes to the south. The RC suspected 'these natives are attempting to proceed to Walvis Bay to enter work with the Harbour Works',²⁸⁸ avoiding the mine labour which the recruiting mechanisms favoured. In March 1926 the NC suspended the issue of visiting passes, except in special cases.

As a measure to tackle inadequate labour supply, a full-time recruiting agent named Cope was appointed by the Consolidated Chamber of Mines in 1926. The agent concentrated his efforts on persuading the Ndonga to migrate, as their low rate of labour migration was 'out of all proportion for the biggest tribe of 40,000.' Mission influence was blamed, as was the weak influence of their king.²⁸⁹ By December little progress showed; 'a very

²⁸⁴ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - UG Representative Namakunde, 14.10.1918; Military Magistrate Tsumeb - Secretary Protectorate, 28.11.1918.

²⁸⁵ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1925.

²⁸⁶ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report October 1928.

²⁸⁷ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report June 1925.

²⁸⁸ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report March 1926.

²⁸⁹ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report August 1926.

determined effort was being made to bring Martin to realise the urgent need for boys to proceed to work.²⁹⁰

Early 1927 saw a slight increase in the migration rate; many of the new recruits were very young boys increasingly directed towards farm labour. Fluctuations continued, sensitive to developments in areas where the labour was directed. In April 1927 a large drop was reported from the previous month, partly due to harvest, but the NC speculated that it was prompted by the rumour that all labour was being sent to Tsumeb.²⁹¹ Overall it was noted that 'Cope was not meeting with conspicuous success.'²⁹² By 1927 an increasing amount of cash from migrant labour earnings was being spent at the store opened by the Chamber of Mines, particularly on clothing and household utensils.²⁹³ 'Up to the present, however, it does not appear to have made much difference to the annual totals of labour recruits'.²⁹⁴ The late 1920s even began to show a fairly steady decline. In 1928 the October figures were the lowest for two years; the slump in Kwanyama migrants was especially noticeable. This was blamed on political uncertainties surrounding the border demarcation.²⁹⁵ Influenza again affected the labour supply in the same period.

The final problem in the systematisation of migrant labour was the administration's weakness in tackling desertions. The unpopular OMEG mine in Tsumeb suffered acutely from this problem.²⁹⁶ Desertion was fairly intractable at this stage because of the difficulty in tracing the offenders.

²⁹⁰ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report December 1926.

²⁹¹ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report April 1927.

²⁹² NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1927.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1928.

²⁹⁵ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.10.1928.

²⁹⁶ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report December 1928.

[L]abourers invariably give fictitious names when issued with labour passes in Ondonga. More activity should be shown by the Police Posts at Namutoni and Dienheib... Natives deserting know perfectly well when and how often patrols go out and know that the patrol keeps to the main open road only. It is not possible with the limited facilities at our disposal to arrest all deserters once they have entered Ovamboland.²⁹⁷

The only successful capture of deserters occurred when three Kwanyama were arrested by Eedes and sent under armed escort to Tsumeb to complete their contracts,²⁹⁸ though such exercises had little overall effect.²⁹⁹ Officials assumed most deserters lived in Angola, where no follow-up action was possible, but the majority of deserters may in fact have been from SWA territory.³⁰⁰

In sum, the colonial administration had little influence over the recruitment of migrant labour; it sought instead to systematise it through registration procedures and control over its movement to and from labour centres. This section has attempted to show how labour exploited weaknesses in the system during the early years of colonialism; initial room for manoeuvre stemmed in large part from the territory's problems of labour shortage.

In conclusion it must be pointed out that the new *régime* of colonial control had implications far beyond migrant labour. This dovetailed with colonial reinforcement of the authority of kings, headmen and lineage seniors in Ovamboland. Aside from migrant workers, the two groups most affected by control over movement from the inception of colonialism were women and young non-migrant men.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

²⁹⁸ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Annual Report 1928.

²⁹⁹ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report December 1928.

³⁰⁰ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report November 1928. Oral evidence reveals that over time headmen became more effective in apprehending deserters; interview Johannes Shihepo, Akwenyanga, 28.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 95).

The latter, most likely educated Ndonga, were described by officials as 'effeminate' because they did not seek work in Tsumeb, but went there to 'sponge' off migrants. They were only allowed passes to Tsumeb if their local headman expressly allowed them.³⁰¹ Probably they were attracted by the incipient urban Ovambo sub-culture in the mining town. However, as one Anglican missionary later argued, the goal of the administration was for those Ovambo not in contract labour to 'stay put'.³⁰²

Ovambo women were required to 'stay put' for a whole complex of reasons. Their migration out of Ovamboland was prohibited because of its allegedly 'immoral effects'.³⁰³ Ndonga women attempting to establish themselves in Tsumeb were refused passes, avowedly to prevent prostitution. Feeding into this type of argument was the blame attached to women for the spread of venereal disease.³⁰⁴ Their requests for passes were referred to the king, Martin ka Dikwa.

One of the complaints occasionally heard from chiefs and the more responsible natives, is that white people help women to break their old laws, which if crude are at least conducive to morality.³⁰⁵

It was a discourse of 'responsible patriarchy', shared by both administration and Ovambo male elders.

In nearly all cases, the administration prevented the movement of women out of Ovamboland.³⁰⁶ A few women who had already succeeded in finding regular work outside Ovamboland successfully avoided repatriation. The failure of Poppe, the Military Magistrate in Tsumeb, to expel an Ovambo woman named Louise demonstrated this.³⁰⁷ The whole question was

³⁰¹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Military Magistrate Tsumeb, 8.7.1918.

³⁰² Bishop Tobias in OMQP, July 1935.

³⁰³ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Administrator Windhoek - RC Ovamboland, 13.7.1918.

³⁰⁴ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 21.5.1918.

³⁰⁵ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Military Magistrate Tsumeb, 12.4.1918.

³⁰⁶ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Administrator Windhoek - RC Ovamboland, 7.6.1918.

³⁰⁷ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Military Magistrate Tsumeb - RC Ovamboland, 2.7.1918.

symptomatic of what Vaughan describes as women's invisibility in colonial concerns, until they attempted to take advantage of new opportunities for mobility.

In a period of rapid social and economic change, women came to symbolize, in a discourse shared by colonial administrators and many African men, 'tradition' and order. It followed that when they stepped out of, or resisted, this role by becoming migrant workers themselves, they would become the object of a particularly heightened concern over social disintegration.³⁰⁸

The only other number of women who succeeded in taking up residence outside Ovamboland were those who belonged to the so-called 'free Ovambo.' These had come south before the South African occupation of South West African territory. The greatest efflux had been during the famine of 1915. These 'free Ovambo' of both genders posed the administration a considerable bureaucratic headache.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Vaughan, *Curing their Ills*, p 22.

³⁰⁹ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, Native Affairs Windhoek - RC Ovamboland, 6.12.1916; Military Magistrate Tsumeb - RC Ovamboland, 29.1.1918.

CHAPTER 7

INDIRECT RULE AND FAMINE IN
OVAMBOLAND c 1928-1935*Native Commissioner Hahn*

It is impossible to appreciate the distinctive character of colonial administration in Ovamboland without including a biographical sketch of 'Cocky' Hahn, the long-serving Native Commissioner. Hahn became something of a legend. In the 1950s genre of white African literature he earned his place among the 'lords of the last frontier.'¹ He 'deeply admired and championed' the Ovambo nation over which he presided,² accepting a 'unique position in the history of Africa, ruling a territory two-thirds the size of Ireland with no police force and no army.'³ Hahn was not unique in some senses; officials in similarly remote colonial outposts in tropical Africa developed comparable methods.⁴ But it was an indication of Hahn's importance that he gained a considerable international profile. Hahn first represented the SWA administration abroad in 1937 when he addressed the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations in Geneva.⁵ In 1942 he accompanied the Minister of Justice, Lawrence, to the United Nations as adviser on the 'native question' in SWA. He performed the same function for Smuts himself in 1946 at the New York UN Conference.⁶

¹ See Green, *Lords*, chapter 16.

² Nissan Davis, "Shongola". 'Cocky Hahn "The Whip"', *South West Africa Annual* 1977, p 33.

³ *Ibid.*; see also Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 70.

⁴ See Robert O. Collins, *Shadows in the Grass: Britain in the Southern Sudan, 1918-1956* (New Haven, 1983).

⁵ Nissan Davis, "Shongola", p 33.

⁶ *Ibid.* See NAN A 450 Vol 15 8/1 - 8/5 for Hahn's record of these proceedings.

Hahn left Ovamboland in 1947 and was appointed a member of the Native Labour Commission in Windhoek. He retired the next year and died on 26 September 1948 at his farm in Grootfontein.⁷ His period of service in Ovamboland spanned 31 years.

What was unique about Hahn's position was that in this period it was extremely rare for a colonial official to be stationed in one place for such a length of time. His family ties with the territory were reminiscent of the Shepstonian dynastic tradition in Natal, as was his marriage to the daughter of Fogarty,⁸ chaplain to the Ovamboland Expeditionary Force and later the first Anglican bishop of SWA.⁹ All this harked back to an earlier era. The family of Carl Hugo Linsingen Hahn had a long historical association with SWA. Hahn's grandfather was Hugo Hahn, one of the first Rhenish missionaries to SWA in 1842.¹⁰ The family had gravitated towards the Cape, his father becoming a minister in Paarl.¹¹

Hahn was born in 1886 and attended Paarl Boys' High School.¹² His early life remains under-researched, making it difficult to gauge what influences shaped the young Hahn. Intellectual attainments seem to have come later in life. Hahn's early development was probably characteristic of white male youth in pre-war South Africa. A great sport enthusiast, his rugby skills were recalled by his admirers even in his old age.¹³

After matriculation, Hahn entered a spell of employment in banking¹⁴ and on the Rand mines.¹⁵ His later style as an administrator recalled that of a

⁷ Nissan Davis, "Shongola", p 33.

⁸ Charles Shannon Mallory, 'Some aspects of the Mission Policy and Practice of the Church of the Province of South Africa in Ovamboland: 1924-1960' (MA thesis, Rhodes University, 1971); Green, *Lords*, p 164.

⁹ SOAS Archives, International Missionary Council Box 1232, Bishop of Damaraland - Tarkkanen FMS, 12.1.1925; Mallory, 'Aspects'.

¹⁰ Green, *Lords*, p 163.

¹¹ Davis, "Shongola", p 33.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Farson, *Behind God's Back*, pp 81-2.

¹⁴ NAN SWAA 2/19/3, Ovamboland Enquiry - Staff complaints, Chaplin vs Hahn, ca 1925.

¹⁵ Davis, "Shongola", p 33.

mine compound manager, though the scanty sources are not explicit as to the nature of his mine employment. When the Union entered the First World War in 1915, Hahn joined the Imperial Light Horse. In the same year he transferred to serve Pritchard's expedition to Ovamboland as Intelligence Officer. He remained in Ovamboland and was appointed to the staff of the first Resident Commissioner. During the 1917 military action against Mandume, he again acted as Intelligence Officer.¹⁶ In 1920 he took over from Manning as Native Commissioner for Ovamboland; Manning became Chief NC in Windhoek.

Hahn's grounding in intelligence work explains in part his methods as NC, especially his use of collaborator intelligence and his political manoeuvres against recalcitrant kings and headmen. But from his earliest days in Ovamboland, a whiff of personal brutality attached to Hahn's name. Ovambo-speakers were very soon calling him *Shongola*, meaning 'sjambok.' Two types of recorded incident, both played down by his superiors and admirers, illustrate why Hahn acquired this epithet. Inextricably intermingled in these accounts was Hahn's talent as a rugby-player.

Apologist secondary accounts claim that Hahn earned the name *Shongola* during the 1915 famine. A young Ovambo man who snatched a bowl of famine relief food from a woman was subjected to a running tackle by Hahn and then beaten with a sjambok. These accounts argue that the name was bestowed on him by an Ovambo people grateful for his forceful and protective action.¹⁷ Whatever the dubious intentions, these accounts do reveal Hahn's lack of inhibition in asserting his authority, physically if need be.

A second source which reported his physical brutality was an enquiry set up to examine aspects of Hahn's conduct as NC, following allegations of irregularities by a disgruntled junior officer. The latter, Chaplin, was in due

¹⁶ Green, *Lords*, p 164; Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 74.

¹⁷ Davis, "Shongola", p 33; Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 81.

course discredited and declared 'neurotic.'¹⁸ Hahn's alleged illegal trading activities were concluded to be sound, allegations of illegal hunting 'without foundation.' He was simply recommended to improve his record-keeping.¹⁹ Accusations of frequent floggings, though acknowledged by Hahn to have occurred among the Kwanyama, were considered unsubstantiated by the enquiry;²⁰ a specific case of gratuitous ill-treatment of an Ovambo woman - involving his famous drop-kick - was denied by Hahn and dismissed by the enquiry.²¹

Flogging as a form of judicial punishment against offenders was widespread in SWA. It was also used in Ovamboland by kings and headmen upon instruction from officials, especially after the Mandume campaign.²² No other written sources - unless they exist in Finnish Mission archives - testify that Hahn himself personally used force. What is striking however is that oral sources affirm that he frequently did so.²³ The name Shongola which remained with Hahn throughout his career was at first probably genuinely inspired by fear, but later acquired a more symbolic function. For as this chapter will argue, in many respects the NC underwent considerable personal development as an administrator. The enquiry had cast doubt on Hahn's assiduousness in keeping records.²⁴ Although Hahn was completely exonerated and his accuser roundly discredited, the effect of the affair may have been to shake up the NC and prevent him from treating Ovamboland as

¹⁸ NAN SWAA 2/19/3, Ovamboland Enquiry - Staff complaints, Chaplin vs Hahn, ca 1925.

¹⁹ NAN NAO Vol 1 1/1, Administrator Windhoek - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 18.12.1925.

²⁰ NAN SWAA 2/19/3, Ovamboland Enquiry - Staff complaints, Chaplin vs Hahn, ca 1925.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² NAN SWAA 2/19/3, Ovamboland Enquiry - Staff complaints, Chaplin vs Hahn, ca 1925.

²³ Interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Okadiina, 5.11.1989; interview with Adolf Ambambi, Oshigambo, 23.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 138-9).

²⁴ NAN NAO Vol 1 1/1, Administrator Windhoek - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 18.12.1925.

his personal domain where his carelessness and irregularities could pass with impunity.

Hahn's career demonstrates that he was consistently a very practical administrator. A man of action, he seemingly revelled in the sporting possibilities offered by a remote border area, despite a climate and isolation most Europeans found notoriously trying.²⁵ Photographs show a striking and vigorous-looking man, with a great air of energy about him. Kwanyama headmen allegedly respected Hahn because he combined two qualities: 'both brains and pluck'.²⁶ It was true that Hahn showed an increasing ability to think through the issues that confronted him as an administrator. A greater intellectual seriousness characterised Hahn in his middle to late years as NC; he developed his interest in Ovambo ethnography, collaborating with several Finnish missionaries.²⁷ His correspondence with anthropologists in South Africa grew.²⁸ He eventually produced a large section on Ovambo customs and ethnography for the authoritative work he co-authored with Vedder and Fourie, *The Native Tribes of South West Africa*.²⁹

Like colonial officials in Matabeleland who glamorised 'martial tribes' and whose Chief NC demanded to be given the royal salutation,³⁰ Hahn made high claims for the special features of Ovambo history. He took particular pains to dwell on the Ovambos' greater historical longevity, claiming that the Zulu were 'newcomers' compared with the Ovambo, who were 'the oldest settled people in Southern Africa'.³¹ An Ovambo 'identity' was served up for

²⁵ NAN DSO MO 5/1, District Surgeon - Secretary SWA, 10.1.1930; NAO Vol 1 1/1, NC Ovamboland - Administrator SWA, 10.10.1933.

²⁶ Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 81.

²⁷ For example, see NAN A450, C.H.L. Hahn papers Vol 9 2/35, N. Waananen, 'The Customs of Ovambos,' 30 December 1926.

²⁸ NAN A450, C.H.L. Hahn papers File 1/30, Correspondence with A.W. Hoernle 1925-45.

²⁹ Hahn, Vedder and Fourie, *The Native Tribes of South West Africa* (Cape Town, 1928).

³⁰ Terence Ranger, 'Ethnicity and Nationality: the case of Matabeleland'

(Unpublished paper, ICS, University of London, May 1991).

³¹ Green, *Lords*, p 164.

outside consumption,³² literally so in the case of the Ovambo homestead constructed in Windhoek for the 1936 trade fair exhibition. It was rare at that time that such a homogeneous 'identity' could be conveyed; Ovamboland's isolation and Hahn's longevity as NC lent it credibility to most outsiders.

Hahn garnered a great empirical knowledge about the culture and history of the people under his control, but this was a common tendency among paternalists and in no way detracted from a fundamental belief in white supremacy. His view was that the mechanisms of social and ideological control by Ovambo ruling groups, while making life at times hidebound for the subordinate, were healthy and admirable.³³ Hahn argued that where westernising influence was least, 'the natives are virile, well-ordered and progressive.'³⁴ But these views were at the same time strongly instrumentalist: 'The "raw" native is also generally preferred at labour centres.'³⁵ Set against the ethos in the similarly mandated territory of Tanganyika, where mission education was viewed positively,³⁶ or the post-Victorian and pre-democratic ethos which influenced Union native administration,³⁷ this made Hahn in comparison a reactionary throwback.

It was in the administrative interest to convey an image of healthy 'tribal' traditionalism. A more accurate depiction would be a changing dynamic of social differentiation, superficially quiescent under the layer of reified authority of kings and headmen. The very success of indirect rule in Ovamboland was owed to the pre-existence of a centralised and stratified social organisation.

While it would have been unusual for any NC in colonial Africa to be accessible to the more subordinate members of society, oral sources suggest

³² Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 74.

³³ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/2/5 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 11.1.1935.

³⁴ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 28.7.1936.

³⁵ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 22.1.1924

³⁶ Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, p 138.

³⁷ Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 101.

that in his personal style Hahn was particularly impatient with and remote from ordinary people. It was alleged that he only listened to headmen and kings.³⁸ This kind of complaint surfaced during the 1929 famine in the testimonies of Kwanyama sub-headmen to the OC at Oshikango.³⁹ In Hahn's own opinion, people were not afraid to approach him with their grievances, though he believed kings' subjects were too intimidated to do so. 'The latter is one of the principal factors which prevents the Native Administration officials gaining the confidence of the people to the same extent as in the "council" tribes.'⁴⁰ In as far as people living under councils had the confidence to complain about their rulers, this view is a complacent one. Whatever evidence Hahn may have used, it could only have been a 'partial transcript.' As Scott points out, the "'full transcript" of class relations... is simply not ascertainable from the public interaction between rich and poor, powerful and weak.'⁴¹

The key to Hahn's effectiveness was not his accessibility to the humble, but his unflagging energy in moving around the district to keep contact with kings, headmen and his intelligence sources. This, seemingly, is how he controlled his frontier.⁴² It was often argued that headmen, especially Kwanyama, could identify with the figure of Hahn. His white admirers dubbed him 'Super-Ovambo.'⁴³

³⁸ Interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Okadiina, 5.11.1989; interview with Petrus Amutenya, Okahau, 28.9.1989.

³⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 8.5.1929; NC Ovamboland - OC Oshikango, 12.5.1929

⁴⁰ NAN A450, C.H.L. Hahn papers Vol 6 File 2/11. Hahn - Amery, M.P., 11.1.1938.

⁴¹ James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak. Everyday forms of resistance* (New Haven, 1985), p 284.

⁴² In 1925 Hahn came into possession of an official car. Union of South Africa, *Annual Report 1926*, p 33. See also Farson, *Behind God's Back*, p 73.

⁴³ Quoted in Davis, "Shongola", p 33. The officer at Oshikango, McHugh, was very sceptical about the possibility of officers being regarded as chiefs by the Kwanyama. NAN A 450, C.H.L. Hahn papers Vol 6 2/11, McHugh - NC Ovamboland, 21.7.1930.

'Indirect rule' in Ovamboland

Hahn equated 'progress' with Ovambo social integrity, as he construed it. Detribalisation, the antithesis, was retrogression. Problems had come when kings behaved too independently and needed to be 'levelled'. Feierman argues that one of the contradictions inherent in indirect rule was that colonialists wanted to appropriate to themselves the awe in which subjects held their chiefs, yet found the most awe-inspiring chiefs inconvenient allies.⁴⁴ This had led to the removal of both Mandume and Ipumbu and their replacement by councils of headmen. Hahn claimed a council had been established in Ombalantu,⁴⁵ but though headmen had been appointed there was little evidence for the existence of a council.

Up to and during the 1920s the term 'council' enjoyed prestige and credibility in the Union. The model most praised was the Transkei network of district councils, chaired by a magistrate and composed of nominated and elected African representatives. These councils had considerable local administrative power and managed a budget generated by taxation. The *Bunga* (General Council) emerged from this network.⁴⁶ The creation of a council in Oukwanyama in 1917 and the appropriation of 'council' credibility current in the Union obscured the fact that its practice differed profoundly from the Transkeian system.

In 1931 the new officer in Oshikango, McHugh, who had police and Union Native Affairs experience, criticised the workings of the Kwanyama council in a confidential letter to Hahn.⁴⁷ He noted that the Kwanyama council had no regular meetings; if there had been, no records were

⁴⁴ Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals*, p 153.

⁴⁵ NAN A 450, C.H.L.Hahn papers Vol 6 2/11, Hahn - Amery, 11.1.1938.

⁴⁶ Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 102; Edgar Brookes, *The History of Native Policy in South Africa from 1830 to the Present Day* (Cape Town, 1924), pp 113-4.

⁴⁷ NAN A 450, C.H.L.Hahn papers Vol 6 2/11, McHugh - NC Ovamboland, 21.7.1931.

preserved. Meetings had been called *ad hoc* to discuss particular matters. McHugh argued that continuity would have made it a recognised institution; tribal cohesion would have been maintained, especially where there was no chief. But the headmen rarely met.⁴⁸ The practice was instead as follows:

Minor matter[s] have invariably been sent to the headmen or decided by them without reference to me. Cases of importance, but not sufficiently important to refer to the council, are referred to particular headmen, in such cases a record is kept. No record of minor cases is kept.⁴⁹

While McHugh argued that 'such a council, holding regular meetings... [would] be a powerful political weapon in the hands of the Administration', it was very significant that Hahn believed this might well work against it.⁵⁰

McHugh was fresh from the Transkei ethos of 'pragmatic conservatism', which Dubow argues was founded on the assumption that 'timely political accommodation from above would pre-empt the emergence of powerful social pressures from below.'⁵¹ By contrast, Hahn appeared to believe that timely reinforcement of authority from above would prevent such pressures. Improvements in the functioning of the Kwanyama council did come slowly however: by 1939 it was holding regular monthly meetings with an officer in attendance.⁵²

Manning, the first RC, had been a product of the Union system of Native Affairs, possibly influenced by the council vogue of the epoch. But the system in Ovamboland had by now developed its own impetus. McHugh was an example of how influences might have worked from the core South African Native Affairs Department to this outmost periphery. In this instance possible innovations tended to run into the sand. The local ethos under Hahn

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ See Hahn's annotations to McHugh's letter, *ibid.*

⁵¹ Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 100.

⁵² Union of South Africa, *Annual Report 1939*, p 166.

was well entrenched and the NC was not amenable to change. A disadvantage for junior officers such as McHugh was the isolation of an Ovamboland posting; unlike the Transkei with its annual magisterial conference to counter isolation,⁵³ little support could be elicited.

By the 1930s Hahn was beginning to formulate the administrative workings in Ovamboland into a coherent framework. He had read reviews of Lugard's classic work in 1929. In his opinion taxation of colonial subjects was a sound principle, but the special conditions in Ovamboland - 'a country where the natives are armed and where a vast fertile country next door is ready to receive any number who are squeezed and wish to evade taxation'⁵⁴ - precluded haste. 'The policy in Ovamboland, regarding this question, in my opinion, should be "go slow".'⁵⁵ But within a short time Hahn began to utilise key concepts of indirect rule in his articulation of the system in Ovamboland.⁵⁶ Its practical benefits rather than its ideology were its most concrete virtue. As in the Union,⁵⁷ it was represented as having emerged organically from local practice. The key was economy: 'This system has worked most satisfactorily and economically and the administration cannot afford to allow it to break down.'⁵⁸

Economy in practice entailed the administration's dependence on mission organisations for health and education work in Ovamboland. Subsidies were made available to the Finnish Mission Society (FMS) hospital⁵⁹ and later their industrial school.⁶⁰ Mission health work received almost

⁵³ Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 102.

⁵⁴ NAN A 450, C.H.L. Hahn papers Vol 6 2/11, Hahn - Clarke, 21.10.1929.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 4.4.1933.

⁵⁷ Dubow, *Racial Segregation*, p 100.

⁵⁸ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/4/1 v 1, Hahn - Secretary SWA, 16.3.1936.

⁵⁹ NAN NAO Vol 12 6/2/3, Alho - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 10.3.1928.

⁶⁰ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1 v 1, Memorandum of Finnish Mission, Ovamboland, 1928.

unqualified approval from the administration.⁶¹ Educational work however became a source of serious contention.

It is not possible here to do more than sketch the outlines of the spread of mission organisations and the growth in number of their adherents. The FMS had been the first mission established in Ovamboland in 1870; its initial conversion rate had been very slow. After 1900, when it claimed 837 converts, the numbers grew rapidly. It claimed 2,873 converts in 1910, 7,695 in 1920 and 23,116 in 1929.⁶² This last figure constituted half the population of Ondonga, estimated at 45,000 in 1930.⁶³ By the early 1920s the FMS had eight main stations, each with a primary school. There was also a seminary in Oniipa where teachers were trained. All teaching was carried out in oshiNdonga. Added to this were 120 schools run by 170 Ovambo teachers, only thirty of whom had been trained for three years in Oniipa. Given the large number of 'bush schools', close supervision by missionaries was out of the question.⁶⁴ The Department of Education's 1926 report on schools in Ovamboland concluded that the Finnish missionaries:

enjoy on a large scale the confidence of the people. In this rapid growth of their work lies the cause of their main weakness. Their work has grown beyond the control of their present staff of European workers, with the result that they have to leave a large portion of work to native helpers who, at the present stage of their development, are quite unfit for the task.⁶⁵

The anxiety of the Administration over rapid Christianisation was indicated by the slowness with which they opened up Ovamboland to other denominations and the stringent conditions imposed before they could enter in 1924. By these terms, each denomination was required to confine itself to

⁶¹ NAN NAO Vol 12 6/2/3, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 22.1.1944.

⁶² NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 4.4.1933.

⁶³ NAN NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - Chief NC Windhoek, 7.12.1930.

⁶⁴ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.6.1932; Union of South Africa, *Annual Report 1923*, p 15.

⁶⁵ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report 1926*, p 56.

an allocated area. Thus Oukwanyama became the mission field of the Anglican church, except for the Finnish station at Engela; the FMS operated in Ondonga, Ongandjera, Uukwaluudhi and Uukwambi. The Catholics opened stations in Ombalantu and Uukwambi.⁶⁶ Missions were also required to enter into their own separate agreements with headmen. Finally, each denomination had to submit a written undertaking to support and promote government policy, encourage Ovambos to work in the south, teach their members loyalty towards the administration, confirm the authority of the headmen and leaders in their territory and emphasise practical education, introducing new syllabuses only after consultation with the Director of Education.⁶⁷

Many of these terms were contested. Both missions and the Permanent Mandates Commission questioned the obligation to encourage Ovambo to work in the south.⁶⁸ Additionally, the FMS protested against restrictions as to area and more fundamentally the loss of their monopoly, especially in Oukwanyama.⁶⁹ Appeals to the International Missionary Council were unsuccessful.⁷⁰ The Finns had to accept that while Engela in Oukwanyama was their single most important station, they were largely confined to Ondonga.⁷¹

The Catholic and Anglican missions gained converts slowly but steadily after their inception. In 1936, after twelve years of work the Catholics

⁶⁶ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 4.4.1933.

⁶⁷ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1 v 1, Administrator Windhoek - Presiding Missionary FMS, 24.3.1927.

⁶⁸ SOAS Archives, International Missionary Council papers, South West Africa, Rhenish and Finnish Missions 1919/1936, Tarkkanen - Oldham, 6.10.1926; IMC - Tarkkanen, 22.10.1926.

⁶⁹ SOAS Archives, International Missionary Council papers, South West Africa, Rhenish and Finnish Missions 1919/1936, FMS Helsingfors - IMC London. 1.9.1924; FMS - Society of the Propagation of the Gospel, 31.7.1924.

⁷⁰ SOAS Archives, International Missionary Council papers, South West Africa, Rhenish and Finnish Missions 1919/1936, Tarkkanen - Rev A.L. Warnshuis, 27.9.1924.

⁷¹ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 4.4.1933.

claimed 1,531 converts.⁷² By 1945 this had risen to 3,152.⁷³ The Anglican mission, whose largest station was at Odibo, claimed roughly 500 converts by 1934 and had an annual increase of approximately one hundred.⁷⁴

Competition between denominations was the ostensible reason for Proclamation 31 of 1932.⁷⁵ It required the Administrator's permission to open schools,⁷⁶ cutting back between fifty to seventy 'bush' schools and outstations of the FMS.⁷⁷ Hahn argued that it

not only helped check this senseless activity and undignified competition for new sites, but has also driven them to reorganise their work and follow more thorough and higher educational standards.⁷⁸

It was not only the quality but the curriculum that aroused contention. The Administrator's 1924 Annual Report criticised FMS education policy for its principally 'biblical nature... it is impossible for instance to find interpreters, since natives have been taught in their own language, nor are skilled labourers, carpenters or blacksmiths to be found.'⁷⁹ After administrative pressure to teach at least one official language,⁸⁰ Afrikaans was included in the syllabus at Oniipa by 1925.

Despite such statements, educational development received little concrete support from the Administration.⁸¹ The Anglican missionary Tobias situated this 'parsimony' in the context of the wider implications of indirect rule in Ovamboland:

⁷² Gotthardt, Würst und Liebeck, *Geschichte der Katholischen Mission in Südwest-Afrika, 1896-1946* (Windhoek, 1946), p 77.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1934, p 59.

⁷⁵ NAN NAO Vol 11 File 6/1/1, Administrator Windhoek - Gotthardt, 16.1.1925.

⁷⁶ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1937, p 44.

⁷⁷ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Chief NC Windhoek, 6.10.1939.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1924, p 31.

⁸⁰ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Administrator Windhoek - Director of Education Windhoek, 11.8.1939.

⁸¹ Union of South Africa, *Report of the South West Africa Commission*, UG 26, 1936, p 74; Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1937, p 51.

The present policy seems to be simply to preserve law and order by indirect rule through Chiefs and Headmen, without doing anything to improve the conditions of the people. In Ovamboland, with the exception of a small grant to the Finnish Mission for Industrial Instruction, the Government does not spend one penny on education. Medical services are totally inadequate, though this is not a matter of policy but of parsimony. The Administration would like to have a large healthy population, because they look upon Ovamboland as a valuable reserve of Native Labour. As to training up Natives to become qualified Teachers, Medical Orderlies, Forestry Officers, Agricultural Demonstrators, Government Clerks, etc, the very idea would be alien to our rulers. The Natives are most useful to the Europeans as raw labour, and they must be encouraged to 'stay put'.⁸²

Stasis was crucial to Hahn's system. But profound contradictions had arisen between the effects of Hahn's brand of indirect rule and the effects of mission education. These contradictions constituted the nub of the NC's objections to mission growth. Hahn argued that in Ondonga the FMS had:

practically destroyed the authority of the chiefs and headmen; so much so that little tribal discipline is left and it becomes more obvious that the tribe is retrogressing.⁸³

As early as 1924, Hahn complained that mission teaching 'frequently imbues feelings of disrespect for superiors and breaks down the old sense of native discipline and reliability.'⁸⁴ Such accusations did not pass unchallenged. Kivinen of the FMS stated: 'If someone retires from the terror of heathenism, it does not mean that the same retires from the authorities.'⁸⁵ Despite mission promises to uphold authority, countered Hahn, 'the invariable sequel is the complaint on the part of ruling natives that missionaries are "breaking" them.'⁸⁶ He raised the spectre of social unrest: 'The Union Government is

⁸² Bishop Tobias in *OMQP*, July 1935.

⁸³ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/2/5, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 27.8.1935.

⁸⁴ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 22.1.1924.

⁸⁵ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Kivinen - Secretary SWA, 8.3.1937.

⁸⁶ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Hahn - ?, ca 1936.

today tasting the bitter fruit of past mistakes in allowing the breaking up of native areas and tribal organisation.'⁸⁷

The significance of Hahn's complaint about the separation of the growing Christian 'section',⁸⁸ the *ovakristi*, was that it posed *administrative* complications. 'Officials in Ovamboland are finding it an uphill fight to get Christianised natives to regard themselves as tribal natives.'⁸⁹ In Oukwanyama the name *ovakristi* developed connotations of severance, a group set apart from normative rituals.⁹⁰ This was not as stark as the 'red people'-Christian divide among the Xhosa,⁹¹ but was a powerful source of tension.⁹²

Hahn's accumulation of ethnographic knowledge provided him with ammunition against missionaries. He frequently responded to their criticisms concerning administrative reinforcement of local power structures, with the rejoinder that their knowledge of the putative Ovambo mentality was faulty.⁹³

Missionaries, generally, but especially newcomers to Ovamboland, are far too prone to regard anything native as unchristian. Their main objective is to have the 'efundula', the most important of all Ovambo rites, smashed up and wiped out, simply because it is native.⁹⁴

Efundula occasioned open rifts between Christians and missionaries on the one hand and headmen and parents, backed by the Administration, on the other. A serious quarrel erupted with the Anglican mission in 1936, on the occasion of the Administrator's visit to Ovamboland. Kwanyama Christians

⁸⁷ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/4/1 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 16.3.1936.

⁸⁸ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 4.4.1933; NAO Vol 9 2/12, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 11.2.1937.

⁸⁹ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/4/1 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Sec SWA, 16.3.1936.

⁹⁰ Interview with Johanna Auene, Oshigambo, 28.2.1990.

⁹¹ Monica Wilson, 'The Growth of Peasant Communities,' in Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa*, Volume II, p 74.

⁹² Missionaries in Ovamboland also referred to non-Christian Ovambo as 'red people' because of the *olukula* made from ochre smeared on their bodies. NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, Tobias - NC Ovamboland, 4.10.1933.

⁹³ NAN NAO 11 6/1/1, Hahn - ?, ca 1936.

⁹⁴ NAN A 450, C.H.L. Hahn papers Vol 4, Minute No 32/5, Hahn, 17.4.1947.

were ordered to boycott the welcoming ceremony for the Administrator, because *efundula* dances would be performed.⁹⁵ Eventually the Administration backed down and only drumming took place, to undo the impression 'that the mission and the Government are opposing sides in a struggle for political power.'⁹⁶ In the mid-1940s, the FMS protested at the abduction of Ngandjera girls for the *ohango* ceremony. The matter went as high as the Secretary for SWA, who finally pronounced that the girls were under age and the mission could not go against the will of the parents and prevent the girls from attending.⁹⁷ More generally, the FMS complained that Hahn glamorised *efundula* by having its dances performed for his official visitors.

While missions elsewhere in Africa were beginning to incorporate and Christianise female initiation rites, missionaries of all denominations in Ovamboland never swerved from a policy of adamant opposition to *efundula*.⁹⁸ The Finns claimed that no decent person could even speak of it.⁹⁹ In the less reserved Anglican view, the whole *efundula* ritual was tainted because of its 'phallic flavour'.¹⁰⁰

Changes in the basis of social authority

The wrangles between the missions and the administration could be detailed at length, but the prime interest of their documented disagreement was that they touched on key social changes taking place in the 1920s and

⁹⁵ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/2/1, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 26.6.1936.

⁹⁶ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 24.6.1936.

⁹⁷ NAN NAO Vol 10 5/7/1, Dymond, Turvey and Bjorklund - Assistant NC Oshikango, 24.7.1946.

⁹⁸ NAN NAO Vol 10 5/7/1, Dymond, Turvey and Bjorklund - Assistant NC Oshikango, 24.7.1946; interview with Sister Credula Ungwanga, Oshikuku, 6.7.1989.

⁹⁹ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Kivinen - Secretary SWA, 8.3.1937.

¹⁰⁰ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 28.7.1936.

1930s. The battles which raged around *efundula* offer one example. These reflected a discourse of control by men - Ovambo, official and missionary - over women. This revealed more about patriarchy, unfortunately, than the aspirations of the young women who agreed or refused to participate in *efundula*. Some of the conflicts facing these women do however emerge, indirectly and piecemeal. The refusal of young Kwambi women to participate in *ohango* in 1931-32¹⁰¹ indicated resistance to Ipumbu's control and a growing attraction to Christianity. Equally, young Christian women often struggled with themselves and missionary prohibitions when they escaped missions to observe or participate in the ceremony secretly.¹⁰² It cut both ways.

Challenges to forms of patriarchal control were one indicator of changes in the basis of social authority in Ovamboland. Dominance by kings and headmen, once firmly embedded in the primary dependencies of production relations, was now reinforced from above by colonial authority. Patronage networks changed subtly; reciprocal flow became less important for headmen in particular, as the 1929-30 famine would show. Economic control that grew from earlier relations of production had adapted tributary methods to encompass migrant labour.¹⁰³ But given that this now overlaid a recent history of rigorous extractive methods developed under the impact of merchant capital, it was increasingly clear that rulers' ideological position premised on former dominance would be gradually undermined by actual practices. In this period, though, Ovamboland did not reach the advanced stage described by Scott, where the transition to capitalist forms of production brought loss of social authority.¹⁰⁴ But the process had begun.

Two relatively new strata were best poised to set themselves up against 'traditional' authority. The first were the so-called police boys. The

¹⁰¹ Hartmann, 'Rural Struggles,' pp 6-7.

¹⁰² Interview with Sister Credula Uugwanga, Oshikuku, 6.7.1989.

¹⁰³ Moorsom, 'Formation', p 91.

¹⁰⁴ Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p 311.

Ovamboland administration employed approximately fourteen at any time;¹⁰⁵ they acted as messengers rather than carrying out police functions. Colonial officials encouraged the maintenance of separate status. 'It is not advisable that they live like ordinary Ovambos in kraals - this would only tend to make them slack and lose caste.'¹⁰⁶ But according to Tobias of the Anglican mission, their status backfired on the administration.

What undermines the authority of the Headmen more than anything else is Police-Boy Government... [they] are feared and resented by both headmen and people as an upstart bullying class, who have the ear of the white ruler as his interpreters and servants... [u]nless they are very carefully supervised they tend to become a great power for corruption and injustice.¹⁰⁷

A small administrative investigation into Tobias' allegations¹⁰⁸ concluded that, if missionaries had real cause for complaint about 'police' abuse of power, they had failed to bring it to the proper attention of the administration. It was conceded that Tobias had informally apprised the OC at Oshikango 'of the fact that some people could not reach me to air their complaints because the police-boys kept them away.'¹⁰⁹ But the investigation found no black police at fault.¹¹⁰ They were 'amongst the keenest supporters of the tribal system of government' and 'jealous of the dignity and status of their respective headmen'.¹¹¹

Though Hahn argued that police boys were respectful towards headmen, it was inevitable that if they committed abuses against subjects which headmen could not prevent, a loss of authority would result. But headmen also directly created their own problems. As one Anglican

¹⁰⁵ Union of South Africa, *Report of the South West Africa Commission 1936*, p 16.

¹⁰⁶ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, Hahn - Clarke, 24.6.1929.

¹⁰⁷ Bishop Tobias in *OQMP*, July 1935.

¹⁰⁸ A refusal to permit Tobias to return to Odibo was briefly considered. NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 14.10.1935.

¹⁰⁹ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 19.9.1935.

¹¹⁰ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, Administrator Windhoek - NC Ovamboland, 19.11.1935.

¹¹¹ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 19.9.1935.

missionary noted during the investigation, '[i]n many cases headmen were as much involved as police boys and, from my observation, I could not say where the abuses originated.'¹¹²

The second group accused of undermining headmen were Christians, in particular the rising group of educated Ovambo evangelists. Hahn deplored the latter as the prime agents of deculturation. The Ovambo teacher was an 'excellent understudy' of the white missionary; 'being more numerous and better versed in the language and customs of the country [he] is a more thorough disintegration [sic] of tribal institutions.'¹¹³ In 1933 Hahn stated:

Such differences and political splits as have occurred in Ukuanyama have been caused by the superior attitude adopted by these [Christian] teachers towards the old and traditional headmen and their almost total disregard of the authority in tribal matters of such headmen.¹¹⁴

An Ovambo educated *élite* made a very slow start compared with rural *élites* in other African colonies. No corpus of black administrative staff emerged in Ovamboland in this period. Elsewhere, these had often come to articulate new agendas of the educated. The late introduction of an official language into FMS educational institutions hampered the development of a local group of black clerks; prior to this the educated were literate only in oshiNdonga.¹¹⁵ Even after the Anglican mission was entrusted with the teaching of English to the sons of Kwanyama headmen in the late 1930s, nearly all their school-leavers fed straight into the migrant labour system.¹¹⁶

Organisations for the educated *élite*, of the type described by Lonsdale in western Kenya,¹¹⁷ did not appear in Ovamboland in the early decades of

¹¹² NAN NAO Vol 13 6/3/1, Statement Cawthorne, 30.8.1935.

¹¹³ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Hahn - ?, ca 1936,

¹¹⁴ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 4.4.1933.

¹¹⁵ The labour recruiter's interpreter, Johannes Shihepo, was an exception. For his background, see Appendix 7, p 87.

¹¹⁶ OMQP No 32, July 1937.

¹¹⁷ John M. Lonsdale, 'Political Associations in Western Kenya,' in Robert I. Rotberg and Ali A. Mazrui, *Protest and Power in Black Africa*, pp 589-638.

colonial rule. Nor did welfare organisations or independent churches develop in this period. Many educated Ovambo appear to have been contained within the structures of the mission organisations. The expansion of the Lutheran church was one channel for the energies of young educated men. But the limitations of such structures for educated Ovambo were suggested by the phase of frustration and convert disillusionment that the Anglican church for example experienced in the 1930s.¹¹⁸ In the course of time this produced an unusual feature among African colonies. Organisations did not commence among an educated *élite*; instead, the first political organisation in Ovamboland was created by migrant labourers.

The famine of the dams

Mapping out the 1929-30 famine is complicated. Unevenness in the stages of food shortage in different localities gave each part of Ovamboland its own famine narrative. This account traces the course of famine in both eastern polities up to the crisis of late 1929; as the famine became more widespread after this date, the account follows the advent of famine into the west and draws out an overall picture.

Scarcity was predicted in eastern Ovamboland as early as May 1928.¹¹⁹ Rains in Ondonga in late 1928 were extremely poor,¹²⁰ leading to a serious shortfall in the first harvest. Initial grain shortages were offset by barter with Kwanyama neighbours who had surplus grain, but by January 1929 a severe food crisis was officially recognised. The state tendency as elsewhere was to recognise famine only when food supply collapsed.¹²¹ Many Ndonga were

¹¹⁸ Mallory, 'Aspects of Mission Policy.'

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 6 for reactions to drought in the context of boundary demarcation.

¹²⁰ See rainfall figures, Appendix 5.

¹²¹ Rangasami, 'Failure', p 1748.

reportedly on the brink of starvation.¹²² Survival depended on the melon harvest, whose seeds when roasted were an important famine food.¹²³ The FMS view of the universal seriousness¹²⁴ was however inaccurate: shortages varied markedly depending on resource differentiation among households. Dearth of grain appeared first among the socially marginal.¹²⁵

Barter by Ndonga with neighbouring areas also corresponded to resources contained within their different social orbits. Householders could exchange cattle, small stock or cash for grain. The resources and energy necessary for bartering with Kwanyama were exhausted first among the poor, the elderly, the 'weak and sick'.¹²⁶ It was these 'poor' whose dramatic lack of subsistence first struck observers in Oshigambo in early 1929, vividly underscoring Ndonga social differentiation.

It was not only 'starvation' which led to a recognition of crisis by officials. Lack of surface water in Ondonga had triggered the movement of cattle southwards, which threatened to spread stock diseases endemic to Ovamboland beyond the isolated north.¹²⁷ The movement of cattle, and very soon people, threatened the structures of control which had been erected to monitor and channel migrant labour and to stop the spread of lungsickness. What officials and missionaries were seeing at this point was a collection of responses to the extreme that famine had reached in the affected areas: their short-term response was to request free supplies from Windhoek for those Ndonga nearing starvation.

¹²² NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929; Juho Syrya Osigambo - Thompson, n.d.

¹²³ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929; Juho Syrya Osigambo - Thompson, n.d.

¹²⁴ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929.

¹²⁵ NAN NAO 34/1 v 1, Juho Syrya Osigambo - Thompson, n.d. A small minority of wealthier Ovambo had sufficient reserves stored to last the entire famine: NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - Chief NC Windhoek, Annual Report 1930.

¹²⁶ NAN NAO 34/1 v 1, Juho Syrya Osigambo - Thompson, n.d.

¹²⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, Administrator Windhoek - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 17.1.1929.

Ndonga attempts at migration in early 1929 constituted a further gradation in famine behaviour. The NC received applications for family groups to migrate to the south.¹²⁸ These were men - probably with migrant experience - who wished to settle in the south with their wives and children, 'for the purpose of residing there permanently and in some instances merely to avoid starvation.'¹²⁹ They were refused. A number of women making independent applications to go south were also refused.¹³⁰

Despite the official veto, by March women and children were arriving at Namutoni police post. Police were instructed by the mines recruiting officer not to issue them with food. Rations were only allowed to recruited male labour. Police were also instructed to refuse rations to Ndonga men who came as labour recruits. Many had been exploiting the infrastructure of labour organisation by returning to their homesteads with the food instead of proceeding south to take up contracts.¹³¹

By March 1929, the administration was receiving supplies of maize from the south and depots were established in Ondonga. This was an interim measure before the policy of food for work could be implemented. Most bags of maize were sold rather than handed out free to indigents.

The natives who are really in need are those who are unable to pay whereas others who are less hardpressed but living on short rations are applying for meal in exchange for cattle.¹³²

¹²⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929; OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 8.5.1929.

¹²⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929.

¹³⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929

¹³¹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, Recruiting officer Ovamboland - Post Commander Namutoni, 5.3.1929.

¹³² NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.3.1929.

Initially the exchange of cattle for maize was permitted, but from June 1929 lack of grazing forced the administration to refuse any further cattle payments.¹³³

The grazing crisis facing Ndonga pastoralists required a different complex of strategies from concerns over grain.¹³⁴ Cattle-owners split up their herds into much smaller units and gave them out to 'almost any native who is in a position to herd and graze them.'¹³⁵ Most still expected to lose their cattle and slaughtering on a large scale began in May.¹³⁶

By mid-1929 a decrease in local cash flow and the suspension of cattle payments for relief maize had put grain purchase beyond the reach of most Ndonga. The only respite in the food situation had been a late but small harvest towards June, which allowed some food to enter local circulation. 'Natives, particularly in the Ondonga area, who have been fortunate enough to reap something are assisting relatives and also others in a less fortunate position.'¹³⁷ By August however numerous Ndonga were reported to be 'squatting' in Oukwanyama.¹³⁸ Officials believed that the 'many old, blind, deformed and sick natives in this area, in a state of starvation', would not survive the famine.¹³⁹ The commencement of the dam construction programme was urged, for only then would it be possible to 'get food to indigent and destitute natives in the form of payment for work done.'¹⁴⁰

¹³³ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929.

¹³⁴ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p 118 inter alia.

¹³⁵ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929.

¹³⁶ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 8.5.1929.

¹³⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929.

¹³⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 8.8.1929; Vol 18 11/1 v 2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Monthly Report June 1929.

¹³⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 8.5.1929.

¹⁴⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929.

When relief works began in Ondonga in August 1929, those worst-hit by famine came forward in large numbers to labour on dam construction. By far the largest contingent of these 'indigent' were older or unmarried women.¹⁴¹ The relative absence of men initially held up dam construction because their labour was necessary for heavy pick work.¹⁴² The first dam project was sited in the most drought-affected area, Okanjigi, employing 400 people per day and 700 in all. In the less acutely famine-stricken area where the second dam commenced construction, officials turned away 100 to 200 people each day.¹⁴³

Though dam work absorbed large numbers, intensive fall-back activities continued. This was apparent from the scarcity of men in dam work: either they had gone south to work, or they had dispersed around Ovamboland to herd remaining stock or trade for food for their dependents.¹⁴⁴ Seasonality offered women opportunity for foraging.¹⁴⁵ Scanty rain in late 1929 held out prospects for veldkos and milk.¹⁴⁶

Late 1929 saw a peak of famine in Ondonga. The long dry months prior to planting and harvesting were always the lowest point in the year due to decreasing grain reserves and few alternative food sources. Ongoing drought in the 1929-30 season intensified the usual hardships of this period and made it the lowest point in the famine survival calendar.¹⁴⁷ In December the NC argued, 'If not for the opportunity thus afforded of earning food hundreds

¹⁴¹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 10.8.1929.

¹⁴² NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 11.10.1929.

¹⁴³ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 11.10.1929.

¹⁴⁴ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

¹⁴⁵ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929; 34/1 v 2, Director of Works Windhoek - Secretary SWA, 3.6.1930.

¹⁴⁶ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 13.10.1930.

¹⁴⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.3.1929.

would perish from starvation.¹⁴⁸ The proportion of absent men had become even more striking. Their numbers were partly absorbed by the splitting up of herds into ever-smaller lots, each needing two men.¹⁴⁹ Most absence however was now due to migrant work. In November 1929 grain sales increased due to a rise in remittances from these labour migrants. But households and individuals with no migrant earnings, 'indigents', needed more free relief at this point.¹⁵⁰ Extremity in November 1929 drove a number of women down to Namutoni where they received food, until Martin sent three headmen to bring them back to Ondonga.¹⁵¹ Dam relief work was insufficient to feed all those in need at this phase of the famine.

Late 1929 had also brought the Kwanyama to crisis point in the famine. Since May they had faced collapse in their food supply, having staved off the onset of famine slightly longer than the Ndonga.¹⁵² They prepared to survive on their crop of melons and beans and resorted to the Angolan grain market. Throughout the long famine, proximity to Angola offered the Kwanyama in SWA both market and pastoral advantages over the Ndonga. They sent most of their cattle to Angola under the care of relatives or people with whom they had entered agreements for the tending of their animals.¹⁵³

Both Oukwanyama and Ondonga presented a very serious famine picture at the end of 1929. The centre and west of the floodplain had up to this date not suffered food collapse. The western harvests in April 1929 had been poor, but surplus from the previous season tided households over the 1929 dry season. Light rains had eased potential grazing problems. Extra work on

¹⁴⁸ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.12.1929.

¹⁴⁹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.12.1929.

¹⁵⁰ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930; 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.11.1930.

¹⁵¹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - OC Native Affairs Tsumeb, 15.11.1929.

¹⁵² NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 8.5.1929.

¹⁵³ NAN NAO 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 13.10.1930.

wells in July revealed anxiety over future scarcity.¹⁵⁴ This became a reality with the failure of rains at the onset of the 1929-30 planting season.

In most western areas the first millet crop was a complete failure. In December Ongandjera presented 'a dreadful and tragic appearance.' Groups of dependent 'refugees' had appeared in the smaller polities.¹⁵⁵ Ongandjera and Uukwaluudhi had no grazing; their second millet crop looked likely to fail. People in Onkolonkadi and Eunda depended completely on the Kunene river for both cattle and human water consumption needs.

The near-totality of scarcity throughout Ovamboland in December 1929 brought the famine to its crux. Collapse in food supply in the western areas and continued scarcity in the east meant that the famine was no longer localised but widespread. Officials believed the pattern of the great 1915 famine was in danger of repeating itself. Drought threatened to cross from region to region, preventing food resources from less affected areas replenishing those which were badly affected and thus spreading the toll of drought. The reduction in regional barter mechanisms from December 1929 made administrative strategies all the more important.

Famine sufferers in the west benefited from state relief structures already in place, which could be extended to their areas. The relief programme had shifted emphasis in December to digging and improving wells, spreading relief to more numerous localities than was possible with dams.¹⁵⁶ From January 1930 the dam construction programme was widened to incorporate central and western areas.

Harvests at the end of the 1929-30 season failed more widely than the previous year. Well-digging and dam construction commenced in Okalongo

¹⁵⁴ Mwala, the King of Uukwaluudhi, invested £50 in the newly established Tribal Trust Fund to purchase picks and shovels for future relief work as an insurance against predicted scarcity. NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 17.7.1929.

¹⁵⁵ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 5.12.1930.

¹⁵⁶ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.12.1929.

in March 1930.¹⁵⁷ Many Eunda abandoned their homesteads and crossed into Angola, which gave access to both markets and the Kunene. Relief well-digging began in Onkolonkadi.¹⁵⁸ The Kwaluudhi harvest was ten per cent that of an average year. Ongandjera harvested about one fifth its average crop; out-migration commenced. Ombalantu had a reasonable harvest and the best surface water availability for stock, but anthrax and lungsickness were rife. In mid-1930 Ongandjera, Onkolonkadi and Eunda were surviving by bartering with Uukwaluudhi and Ombalantu.¹⁵⁹

The Kwambi harvested a quarter of their requirements, the Kwanyama about two-thirds. The latter's shortfall was exacerbated by the previous year's harvest failure. Officials estimated a quarter of the Kwanyama were completely without grain.¹⁶⁰ Children were sent to stay at the cattle outposts where milk and wild roots offered a better diet.¹⁶¹ The Kwanyama prepared to slaughter about half of their surviving stock.¹⁶² Worst of all in the famine scenario was Ondonga. It was their second year of famine; this season's harvest was about one-fifth the normal pre-famine crop.

The structures of state famine relief had largely standardised the experience of scarcity into the universal response of food for work. A small amount of exchange did continue in localised western areas, but on the whole, state famine relief policy created a uniform dependency across Ovamboland, establishing a lengthy plateau phase in famine survival which lasted until the end of 1930.

¹⁵⁷ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 7.3.1930; 34/1 v 2, OC Oshokango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

¹⁵⁸ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 7.3.1930.

¹⁵⁹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.9.1930.

¹⁶⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Director of Works Windhoek - Secretary SWA, 3.6.1930.

¹⁶¹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 7.3.1930.

¹⁶² NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Director of Works Windhoek - Secretary SWA, 3.6.1930.

The famine story did not end without suspense. In late 1930, no rain fell at the start of the usual planting season.¹⁶³ A third famine season threatened the east, whose poorer households faced millet seed shortages; cowpea and groundnut seeds were confined to wealthier Ovambo.¹⁶⁴ Even the least-affected Mbalantu faced severe food shortage and were losing stock.¹⁶⁵ Official concern at further drought deepened when it appeared the Portuguese were considering the suspension of SWA administrative purchases of grain from Angola.¹⁶⁶ Previously this had relieved supply problems when transport problems affected the south.¹⁶⁷

The bleak prospects of continued drought and scarcity began to fade however with good rainfall in mid-December. Further stock losses seemed likely to be averted.¹⁶⁸ A short dry spell followed, but in February and March 1931 rains 'brought on the crops wonderfully well' and turned the whole of Ovamboland into 'one beautiful study in green.'¹⁶⁹ With further rainfall a good crop was expected.¹⁷⁰ The famine recovery process could slowly begin.¹⁷¹

¹⁶³ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.12.1930.

¹⁶⁴ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 25.7.1930.

¹⁶⁵ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 5.12.1930; Vol 40 34/1 v 2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.12.1930.

¹⁶⁶ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 1.12.1930; Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 10.11.1930; Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.11.1930; 34/1 v 3, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 3.2.1931. The Portuguese had become sensitive to what they believed to be revived German nationalism in SWA.

¹⁶⁷ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC Native Affairs Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

¹⁶⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Telegram NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 17.12.1930.

¹⁶⁹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - Clarke, 5.3.1931.

¹⁷⁰ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, Famine Report March 1931.

¹⁷¹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - Clarke, 5.3.1931; Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 3.3.1931.

The framework of famine and famine response

It is now a truism in famine historiography that famine is a process, not an event.¹⁷² It is also a process within wider processes. Factors which contributed to the onset of famine, shaped its contours and Ovambo responses to it, were also integral to the recovery period. This section attempts to disentangle processes and contingencies which caused famine, outlines a framework through which the stages of famine and responses to it can be viewed, touching finally on some of the effects of the famine. Relations of production during famine are dealt with in the following section.

A complex of interlocking factors brought on the 1929-30 famine in Ovamboland, though as Watts argues, it is unclear at which point factors become causes.¹⁷³ Poor rainfall in 1928 certainly triggered off scarcity. But to give drought sole causational emphasis ignores the wide range of features which conditioned Ovamboland's proneness to famine at the end of the 1920s. One such feature was the boundary demarcation of 1927-8, with its disruptions of settlement and pastoral activity.¹⁷⁴ More deeply-embedded features included the floodplain environment, whose diverse resources allowed for a relatively self-contained agricultural system, but in a fragile ecological setting partly dependent on the Angolan water system. Colonialism had not reduced the isolation of Ovambo agriculture, nor its subsistence as opposed to cash character. One implication which lack of markets on the SWA side of Ovamboland had for scarcity was that the machinery for the importation of grain was not put in place until famine became serious.

¹⁷² Watts, 'Entitlements', p 17.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p 16.

¹⁷⁴ Though these effects were ambiguous for the many Kwanyama who could turn their proximity to the border to good effect.

In Angola a different set of factors operated. Mercantile networks were well established, thriving off state taxation policy among other things. Spiritan missionaries described how traders came in the wake of officials, offering low prices for cattle at the crucial point where southern Angolans had to pay tax or face harsh punitive measures.¹⁷⁵ The trade network connected grain supply from the highlands further north with dealers in Omatemba and Namakunde in Ovamboland, who also bought up surplus grain locally¹⁷⁶ in advance of scarcity for later resale. This Angolan trade dynamic affected the Ovambo in SWA in two ways. Firstly, households in Angola had less to barter, both through taxation and the buying up of their surplus, which threw Ovambo from SWA on to the professional market when they sought to exchange cattle for grain across the border. Secondly, at the onset of famine, terms of exchange for the Ovambo became very unfavourable¹⁷⁷ and resulted in the severe depletion of herds. Markets offered a way to delay famine onset or to survive it, but famine sufferers were very vulnerable to exploitation.

Any framework seeking to mark out stages of famine and Ovambo responses must recognise the broader definition of famine implied in the Ovambo term *ondjala*, which signifies both hunger and famine,¹⁷⁸ encompassing periods of hunger which may not have brought death through starvation ('famine that kills'). This by contrast is the predominant connotation given to the term famine in English usage.¹⁷⁹ The definition of famine implied here is scarcity, at times but not necessarily resulting in mortality.

¹⁷⁵ BG 27 1913-14, 'Mission du Cunène'.

¹⁷⁶ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929; Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 13.10.1930.

¹⁷⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 8.5.1929.

¹⁷⁸ Turvey, Zimmerman, Taapopi, *Kwanyama-English Dictionary*, p 104. This broader definition is common elsewhere in Africa. See de Waal, *Famine That Kills*, p 12.

¹⁷⁹ De Waal, *Famine That Kills*, p 18.

Rangasami argues that famine passes through three stages: a consistently low level of food intake, its further declining trend, and a final collapse of food consumption.¹⁸⁰ The narrative in the last section showed that famine in its different phases rolled across Ovamboland, from east to west, over the course of two years. It affected different areas at different times: when Ondonga's food consumption level first collapsed, the Kwanyama had only entered the phase of lowness. One year later, as Oukwanyama and Ondonga reached a plateau through access to outside sources of grain, the food supply in the western areas collapsed for the first time.

The usefulness of marking out phases of scarcity, particularly the early onset of famine, is that it privileges human agency. In Ovamboland there was a distinct sequence of anticipatory activities prior to collapse. These 'household coping strategies' fall broadly into the three-stage model derived from a wide study of African famines. The first stage sees the employment of insurance mechanisms, which include cropping strategies, wild food gathering and interhousehold loans; secondly, households dispose of productive assets, which in Ovamboland took the form of sale or slaughter of livestock; finally there is destitution, distress migration and death.¹⁸¹

The 1929-30 famine was characterised by an intensification of the first two stages. The situation changed from month to month: temporality and locality produced a complex web of cross-cutting strategies across Ovamboland because each area had its own momentum. Unevenness in the impact of drought and harvest failure in the region as a whole had pulled Ovamboland out of uniform and universal dearth during past famines. Interchange of grain between neighbouring areas, a prime insurance mechanism, was threatened by the widening of famine from December 1929. The onset of the third stage was indicated by attempts to migrate south, but

¹⁸⁰ Rangasami, 'Failure,' p 1748.

¹⁸¹ Watts, 'Entitlements', p 18, citing J. Corbett, 'Famine and Household Coping Strategies', *World Development*, 16, 1988, pp 1099-1112.

state intervention prevented deaths,¹⁸² as well as halting further 'distress migration.'

Labour migration for cash remittances, one of the most important survival strategies in the famine, was strategic rather than a symptom of deepest crisis. This fell into the second stage of 'coping strategies', disposal of productive assets. Famine generally helped Ovamboland swing further towards a money economy. Specific state measures hastened the process. When the Kwanyama food crisis persisted in late 1929, the NC was adamant no Kwanyama cattle should be exchanged for relief grain. He argued that if the Ndonga had parted with £800 per month for grain, when their proportion of migrant labourers was much lower than among the Kwanyama, then the latter had even more reason to part with cash rather than cattle.¹⁸³

After the 1929-30 season failure, large numbers of Ndonga men applied for labour passes to the south,¹⁸⁴ but proportionally fewer Kwanyama sought this option. They were purchasing large amounts from Portuguese traders, exchanging cattle and possibly utilising savings. The Kwanyama had more experience of migrant labour and a better labour intelligence network than the Ndonga men now going down in large numbers; they found trade a more attractive alternative to working in the relatively bad conditions now obtaining in the depressed south. The increase in migrant labour among sections like the Ndonga and emphasis on cash sales of grain at depots from mid-1929 both helped to entrench a money economy more deeply. A trivial but telling symptom of this trend was the commercialisation of frog-catching, when this source of food briefly became available in late 1929.¹⁸⁵

By mid-1930 terms of trade on the Angolan market had become excessively unfavourable. One single trader was reported to have

¹⁸² For a comparable situation and state prevention of mortality, see John Iliffe, *Famine in Zimbabwe 1890-1960* (Gweru, 1990), p 55 *passim*.

¹⁸³ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.12.1929.

¹⁸⁴ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

¹⁸⁵ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - Strachan, 21.11.1929.

accumulated 1,811 oxen and 600 cows from Kwanyama both sides of the border since January 1930.¹⁸⁶ When a dozen or so such independent traders were known to be operating, the toll on Ovambo cattle herds amounted to a haemorrhage. The standard price for one beast, previously two bags of grain, was now reduced to one bag; heifers often went now for half a bag. Hahn acknowledged that Portuguese officials attempted to check this 'shameful' exploitation, but traders operated far from official posts and beyond their control.¹⁸⁷

Some of the worst examples occurred in the west. The Eunda were at the mercy of Portuguese dealers located in Okishandja, who exchanged one bag of corn and one bottle of brandy for one beast, or one pound sterling. This small area had few migrant labourers, which limited their ability to purchase grain in SWA. The limitations of both SWA and Angola markets were therefore experienced most keenly here. As a result, the administration incorporated Eunda in relief work in Onkolonkadi.

Colonial debate on relief strategy had been launched as soon as the crisis was recognised in January 1929. It reflected administrative concerns over Ovamboland's place in the wider SWA context. Views in Windhoek were influenced by the extent to which the Ovambo were still a group of armed polities; a suggestion that relief be made conditional on disarmament was however discouraged by Hahn.¹⁸⁸ The latter argued that the most needy did not own guns. Moreover, the troubled Ndonga succession made Hahn reluctant to disarm the Ndonga, as this would weaken Martin ka Dikwa, who was still the most important pivot in the structure of indirect rule in Ovamboland.¹⁸⁹ Hahn's reservations about change were overcome with

¹⁸⁶ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 3.8.1930.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, Administrator's meeting re prospective famine conditions in Ovamboland, 9.2.1929.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

regard to taxation.¹⁹⁰ The need to establish a Tribal Trust Fund had been argued for some time; the crisis was seen as opportune. As a concession to the peculiarities of Ovamboland, Windhoek conceded that this tax could be paid in either grain or cash. During the difficult starting years of the fund, it was also accepted that not all taxable subjects could pay.¹⁹¹ Of cash taxes raised in 1930, almost all came from migrant labour remittances.¹⁹²

As an official baseline, consensus existed over a relief policy that kept free food relief to a minimum. The labour recruiting agent Cope suggested in January 1929 that food should be provided in exchange for dam work, urging that this should commence before people became too weak.¹⁹³ This policy was adopted, and became effective from August 1929. It had the advantage, on paper at least, of food reaching the poorest, but in effect placed the burden of the *quid pro quo* for famine relief directly and more absolutely on subjects rather than rulers.

The Director of Works' seminal report of June 1930 engaged with the technical side of the relief debate. Officials in Ovamboland had found that dam work assisted those who resided close to sites, but the programme was not easily extended. Organisation could not keep pace with demand.¹⁹⁴ The programme had shifted to emphasising the improvement of existing waterholes, which gave wider accessibility to work for relief. The Director of Works supported the need for well enlargement, but argued dam work was the most economical way of distributing relief. Incorporating migrant labour into the debate, he proposed that 'some scheme be set on foot, whereby every Ovambo in employment be urged or even compelled to contribute towards the upkeep of his people during the famine period.'¹⁹⁵ The report estimated a

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report 1930*, pp 72-85 *passim*.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.1.1929.

¹⁹⁴ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

¹⁹⁵ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Director of Works Windhoek - Secretary SWA, 3.6.1930.

total of eleven thousand men were now in the south, working or seeking work.¹⁹⁶ The implementation of a direct rather than voluntary remittance system tightly incorporated migrant labour into relief mechanisms.

Local officials were agreed that wells could not accommodate much stock.¹⁹⁷ Dam-building required less equipment and was labour-intensive. The emphasis in relief policy from mid-1930 therefore remained on dam construction.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, bigger headmen voiced a definite preference for dams rather than wells.¹⁹⁹ The case for Kwanyama headmen was put by the Oshikango officer:

the construction of dams, in each Headman's area and under tribal organisation, gives a personal interest to every one working on the dam, as well as providing a means of watering their stock, which at present has to be grazed and watered in Angola.²⁰⁰

Famine at times starkly intersected with politics. This was nowhere more striking than the colonial position adopted towards Uukwambi. In 1930 the Kwambi expected to harvest a quarter of their average crop. As they were still selling grain to other areas and were not sending out much migrant labour,²⁰¹ the NC argued they must have stores remaining from the previous year. But the NC's decision to withhold relief pending instructions from Windhoek derived principally from a punitive attitude towards Ipumbu, '[i]n view of Chief Ipumbu's failure to induce his subjects to pay the Ovamboland tax.'²⁰²

The official stance towards the Kwanyama offered a complete contrast.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

¹⁹⁸ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.11.1930.

¹⁹⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 3.9.1930; 25.10.1930.

²⁰⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

²⁰¹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

²⁰² NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 7.3.1930.

total of eleven thousand men were now in the south, working or seeking work.¹⁹⁶ The implementation of a direct rather than voluntary remittance system tightly incorporated migrant labour into relief mechanisms.

Local officials were agreed that wells could not accommodate much stock.¹⁹⁷ Dam-building required less equipment and was labour-intensive. The emphasis in relief policy from mid-1930 therefore remained on dam construction.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, bigger headmen voiced a definite preference for dams rather than wells.¹⁹⁹ The case for Kwanyama headmen was put by the Oshikango officer:

the construction of dams, in each Headman's area and under tribal organisation, gives a personal interest to every one working on the dam, as well as providing a means of watering their stock, which at present has to be grazed and watered in Angola.²⁰⁰

Famine at times starkly intersected with politics. This was nowhere more striking than the colonial position adopted towards Uukwambi. In 1930 the Kwambi expected to harvest a quarter of their average crop. As they were still selling grain to other areas and were not sending out much migrant labour,²⁰¹ the NC argued they must have stores remaining from the previous year. But the NC's decision to withhold relief pending instructions from Windhoek derived principally from a punitive attitude towards Ipumbu, '[i]n view of Chief Ipumbu's failure to induce his subjects to pay the Ovamboland tax.'²⁰²

The official stance towards the Kwanyama offered a complete contrast.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC Native Affairs Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

¹⁹⁸ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 8.11.1930.

¹⁹⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 3.9.1930; 25.10.1930.

²⁰⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

²⁰¹ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

²⁰² NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 7.3.1930.

Relief works are necessary immediately to prevent starvation and migration to Angola... Although they do not wish to live under the Portuguese they will be compelled by necessity to cross the border.²⁰³

In fact many had already done so. The continuing threat of losing large numbers of migrant workers in the famine years earned the Kwanyama a different state response from the Kwambi, despite the former reaping sixty per cent of their average crop in 1930.

In conclusion, factors wider than drought shaped the contours of this famine. The impact of capitalist penetration, mediated through colonial administration, as well as the continued operation of merchant capital in Angola, interacted with the different local socio-political structures as well as contingent forces. They affected different areas to different degrees. For example Ondonga, the most penetrated by colonial and mission structures, was the first to reach crisis precipitated by drought; Ombalantu, the least penetrated by external structures, was last. While the extent and timing of drought was an important factor in the onset and course of famine in the two areas, external factors were influential. During the course of the famine, state relief mechanisms became most embedded in Ondonga, which effected a more profound reorientation towards a cash economy and migrant labour than in any other polity. Similarly, greater Kwanyama access to Angolan markets may have been detrimental to their cattle herds; but herds could be reconstructed, whereas it was difficult to extricate Ondonga from its closer incorporation into a cash economy. Ondonga was the main interface of Ovambo interaction with the external economy: the effects of famine in integrating the floodplain more deeply into the latter were, therefore, experienced most profoundly here.

²⁰³ Ibid.

Social relations and the gender relations of production during the famine

Patronage networks remained an important means of overcoming problems of purchasing food. In Ondonga the king went to great lengths to obtain relief to distribute to Ndonga in need, sending his own transport around Ovambo and buying grain from Portuguese traders. The NC noted that by March 1929 he had 'spent practically all his personal savings to help his subjects.'²⁰⁴ In negotiations over settlement space for Kwanyama in eastern Ondonga, Martin now requested payment from the administration in grain rather than cash.

Martin emphasised the fact that he is not making the request for himself personally, but on behalf of his people and the meal can be distributed to the areas in urgent need of food, by the Government officials.²⁰⁵

This royal patronage offered a striking contrast to Oukwanyama.

By mid-1929 the Kwanyama were experiencing scarcity of similar proportions to the Ndonga position of January, but disagreement brewed between administrative offices in Ondangwa and Oshikango over its seriousness. The bigger headmen had informed Hahn that the famine was not as severe as in Ondonga. Sub-headmen contradicted this in their communications with Eedes at Oshikango.²⁰⁶ This dissonance reflected on Hahn's personal style as an administrator. Oral sources agree that Hahn only consulted big headmen and refused to hear complaints from lesser headmen or the ordinary householder.²⁰⁷

The fundamental issue here was why the great Kwanyama headmen did not activate patronage networks in the Ndonga style. Eedes complained

²⁰⁴ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.3.1929.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 8.5.1929; OC NA Ovamboland - OC Oshikango, 12.5.1929.

²⁰⁷ Interview with Tomas Kalumbu, Okadiina, 5.11.1989; interview with Petrus Amutenya, Okahau, 28.9.1989.

that Kwanyama headmen did not help their constituents; their attitude was 'each man for himself.'²⁰⁸ Certainly as individuals they had less resources than the king of Ondonga. The disagreement between headmen and sub-headmen over alerting the administration to the degree of famine also reflected the great headmen's isolation from poorer subjects.²⁰⁹ In denying the seriousness of famine, they were probably concerned that sub-headmen should not assume greater importance by articulating grassroots distress.

The yoke of the great Kwanyama headmen, with colonial support, had come to lie heavy, unresponsive and authoritarian on their subjects. Redistributive mechanisms in Oukwanyama had been transformed since the abolition of kingship and the installation of the council of headmen. The latter were government nominees; those hand-picked in 1917 had all been opponents of Mandume. Their outlook was shaped by the long history of *omalenga* tensions with centralised kingship. Though competing to some extent with patronage mechanisms exercised by kings in the heyday of merchant capital, *omalenga* never came close to the totality of social responsibility which meshed production, ideology, control and redistribution. But the latter was still in place in Ondonga even after fifteen years of colonial rule, though it was recontextualised in a new setting with markets and administrative resources. The networks of redistribution and reciprocity, such as Giblin has described for the pre-colonial (and pre-mercantile) Zigua in Tanzania,²¹⁰ still tied the Ndonga kingship to its dependents. Kwanyama headmen did not assume the same networks when limited kingly prerogatives devolved their way in 1917. By this time they had accumulated considerable wealth; Clarence-Smith argues probably with justice that the

²⁰⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 8.5.1929; NAO Vol 18 11/1 v 3, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, Monthly Report August 1930.

²⁰⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - OC Oshikango, 12.5.1929.

²¹⁰ James Giblin, 'Famine and Social Change during the Transition to Colonial Rule in Northeastern Tanzania, 1880-1896', *African Economic History*, 15, 1986, p 94.

persistence of quasi-slavery by 'servants' would have benefited headmen.²¹¹ If so, it made them less dependent on the services of free Kwanyama.

Once the dynamics of dam-building were grasped, however, Kwanyama headmen eagerly requested dams in their areas.²¹² Not only did dams provide water for cattle, but the organisation of labour around the dams reinforced their local control with government backing and resources, because the administration depended on them to supply labour.²¹³ Headmen used these opportunities innovatively to establish new patronage networks.

Those whose labour was mobilised remembered famine labour negatively. 'People were told they would be provided with food, but in fact they were made to work.'²¹⁴ This was the first time a food-for-work programme had been employed in Ovamboland. The Germans had issued free rations; in 1915-16 maize meal had been sold.²¹⁵ Part of the resentment centred on the taxation which had been introduced in 1929 to be paid in grain or cash into the newly established Tribal Trust Fund. Hahn had explained to headmen that taxation grain would be available for re-distribution during scarcity. During the famine, however, relief was only distributed in exchange for dam labour; moreover, relief grain was mostly maize, not millet.²¹⁶ Grievances developed at alleged failure to redistribute grain collected, especially among women, who found the grinding of maize more laborious than millet.²¹⁷ A further grievance was the examination of household grain stocks in 1930 by officials from Native Affairs and Public Works. The official invasion proceeded despite 'considerable resentment on the part of the native

²¹¹ Clarence-Smith, *Slaves*, p 82.

²¹² NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

²¹³ NAN NAO Vol 41 34/1 v 3, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 31.1.1930.

²¹⁴ Interview with Petrus Amutenya, Okahau, 28.9.1989.

²¹⁵ Pritchard in Union of South Africa, *Tour to Ovamboland*, pp 4 and 14.

²¹⁶ Supplies purchased from Angolan dealers by the administration consisted of millet; this was the only exception.

²¹⁷ Wolfe, *Thirst belt*, pp 73-4.

who looks upon his sealed grain basket much as a European would upon his private banking account.²¹⁸

Most studies of famine concentrate on the intensification of stratification. But it can also be argued that those Ovambo with higher socio-economic status were disempowered at particular points in the famine. When the administration ceased accepting cattle in exchange for grain in June 1929,²¹⁹ this reduced the options of better-off households and probably threw more hands into dam work when this commenced in August.

Famine labour may have been a leveller in a restricted sense, but distribution of relief grain was at times channelled through new patronage networks and became the site of intensified antagonisms between the poor and the more powerful. Most of the overall supervision of labour operations and food distribution was performed by 'police boys.' On smaller dams sub-headmen fulfilled this function. These received double rations.²²⁰ In Uukwaluudhi, where no dams were built but relief was distributed, grievances arose over notables receiving grain while the poor were marginalised.²²¹ In Ondonga, bribery and favouritism feature in oral testimony.²²² Written documentation was less likely to report corruption,²²³ but the system undoubtedly left openings for opportunism.

The vast bulk of dam labour was performed by women and children.²²⁴ No rations were distributed unless this labour was performed.²²⁵ At times men replaced their children or relatives for a few days before taking up other

²¹⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Director of Works Windhoek - Secretary SWA, 3.6.1930.

²¹⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 6.6.1929.

²²⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC Oshikango - OC NA Ovamboland, 3.9.1930.

²²¹ Interview with Maria Embumbulu, Onghiila, 28.9.1989.

²²² Interview with Jeremia Benjamin, Oshigambo, 2.10.1989 (Appendix 7, p 156); interview with Adolf Ambambi, Oshigambo, 23.9.1989 (Appendix 7, pp 140-1).

²²³ One example is reported in NAN NAO Vol 41 43/2, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 9.1.1931.

²²⁴ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 23.9.1930; Vol 18 11/1 v 3, NC Ovamboland - Chief NC Windhoek, 7.12.1930.

²²⁵ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Administrator Windhoek - Hahn, ca August 1930.

survival activities.²²⁶ Able-bodied men were expected to make their way south to engage in the road construction schemes which had been launched to soak up labour as the mining industry shrank with the onset of depression. These workers were paid just over £1 per month, a quarter of which was remitted to Ovamboland to the worker's family via the NC's office.²²⁷ Among Ndonga men of eligible working age in 1930, 3,000 were in the south as migrants and only 15 remained, each having presented 'good cause' to the NC for his need to remain in Ovamboland.²²⁸ The administration recognised that most men of 45 and older did not migrate. The official argument, that these relatively senior males 'hold together family life and are the mainstay of tribal organisation',²²⁹ served to reinforce their gender and generational weight. A small number of older men were employed on dams for the heavy pick work, while women ferried baskets of loosened sand to the surface.²³⁰ For the latter, in weakened physical condition from inadequate or monotonous diet, this was gruelling labour.

But it was not only labour organisation at the food-for-work sites which revealed a great deal about the politics of the 'famine of the dams.' The naming of the famine offers hints as to the perceptions of the less powerful. It was almost certainly women who coined the term *ondjala yavondama*. In a way it is a rare emergence of women's discourse. Famine contains different meanings for women than for men, as emerges vividly from Megan Vaughan's study of the 1949 famine in central Malawi.²³¹ The 1929-30 famine in Ovamboland marked the first occasion that women came directly into contact with the colonial state in any broad way. Pre-colonial Ovambo kings

²²⁶ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 23.9.1930.

²²⁷ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, Administrator Windhoek - Hahn, ca August 1930; Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1930, p 71.

²²⁸ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 23.9.1930.

²²⁹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 23.9.1930.

²³⁰ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 2, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 23.9.1930.

²³¹ Megan Vaughan, *The story of an African famine. Gender and famine in twentieth-century Malawi* (Cambridge, 1987), pp 32-5 and 120.

had used *corvée* labour to create reservoirs in the past. Duparquet however did not record in his observations the sex ratio of this labour;²³² as in most cases of gender blindness, it probably implies men performed the labour. This suggests that apart from *efundula*, the first time women came directly into contact *en masse* with the state, pre-colonial or colonial, was during the famine of the dams.

1929-30 famine labour became an institution which in Watts' expression had 'a distinctly ambivalent function in peasant life.'²³³ Such institutions simultaneously made claims on individual resources, including labour, while fulfilling insurance functions and assisting in the reproduction of inequality.²³⁴ In the Ovambo case, the famine labour experience not only reproduced inequality but actually defined women's subordination under colonialism. The argument that the process of famine intensifies and deepens pre-existing exploitation²³⁵ takes on overwhelming gender dimensions here.

The name 'famine of the dams' remains intrinsically ambivalent however and does not simply imply exploitation. It implies labour coercion, but also resistance to social breakdown. De Waal has pointed to a category of famine names which suggest those not normally destitute may take a socially marginal role for a short period.²³⁶ In Ovamboland, dam work was hated, but women pursued it as a strategy in order to be ready to resume normal subsistence activities once the famine ended.²³⁷ As one informant pointed out, 'Hahn forced people to construct dams, but gave them mealie meal in tins, which saved them from hunger.'²³⁸ It was a short term experience of marginalisation *en masse*. By naming it the 'famine of the dams,' women were establishing their central role in enabling society to survive the famine intact.

²³² AGCSSp 465-III, Duparquet, Notes sur les Omarambas, ca 1800.

²³³ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p 146.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Watts, 'Entitlements,' p 19.

²³⁶ De Waal, *Famine That Kills*, p 74.

²³⁷ Interview with Johanna Auene, Oshigambo, 28.2.1990.

²³⁸ Interview with Auene Shaningwa and Konis Imene, Onampadhi, 4.11.1989.

Social processes and migrant labour

The early 1930s marked a climax of gradual changes within Ovamboland. These came at a point where the demands of the external labour market underwent significant changes. Emmett argues there was an escalating crisis in Ovamboland from the late 1920s, which accounts for the beginnings of an increased rate of labour migration.²³⁹ Emmett is careful not to produce a simple famine-migrant labour equation, but unless the changing dynamics of production and social processes are fully taken into account, it would be all too easy to assume this equation and leave it at that.

For migrant labour as with famine, genesis lay in interconnecting processes. Several of the factors which led to the crisis in food supply in 1929 also contributed to the pressure on labour to migrate, besides actual scarcity itself. Ecological pressures and deepened stratification from the impact of mercantilism played their role in promoting migrant labour, just as they increased Ovamboland's proneness to famine.

A significant upsurge in the migration rate from Ovamboland only came in the 1940s, but Emmett argues that the tendency towards increase first manifested itself in the early 1930s.²⁴⁰ This is broadly true, but overlooks a contradiction in migration figures. The specifics of the post-famine situation, in conjunction with the cumulative effect of social changes up to 1930 and the increased systematisation of the state labour organisation, require very close appraisal.

Famines *per se* did not produce any sustained increase in Ovambo labour rates. Increases occurred during scarcity, both in 1915-16 and 1929-30,

²³⁹ Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism,' pp 347-8.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

but these fell off immediately afterwards. The figures in Table 2 below demonstrate this in the case of 1929-30.

Table 2. Annual totals of labour recruited in Ovamboland

<u>Year</u>	<u>Ovambo</u>	<u>Angolan</u>	<u>Total</u>
1924	3273	672	3945
1925	3269	1080	4349
1926	4033	1134	5167
1927	4211	1403	5614
1928	—	—	4091
1929	3271	1905	5176
1930	2507	1649	4156
1931	407	1062	1469

Source: Union of South Africa, *Annual Reports* 1926-31.

As argued in the post-1916 case, the powerful undertow of lineage relations drew labour back into recovery processes in Ovamboland. During famine younger male labourers were most useful to their kin when channelled into migrancy; but after famine, their labour was more useful close to the homestead. The tending of herds in the Oshimpolo outposts was particularly important for reconstruction. In addition, terms of trade usually turned sharply in favour of pastoralists in the aftermath of famine.²⁴¹ The other important incentive for labour not to migrate was to assist with cultivation once the drought broke. Mission sources suggest that by the 1930s the sexual division of labour in households had adjusted to involve men increasingly in cultivation.²⁴² This may have been more apparent in Christian households.

What did affect the labour migration rate from the pivotal early 1930s period was a shift from single to recurrent labour contracts. This was a shift in pattern rather than scale, but had long term implications for increased numbers in labour migration. Crucial in promoting recurrence was the

²⁴¹ Watts, *Silent Violence*, p 145.

²⁴² Mallory, 'Aspects of Mission Policy.'

modernisation of infrastructure, which had a direct impact on the isolated north. After the introduction of motor transport to take labour to the Tsumeb railhead,²⁴³ the Anglican mission commented:

Most of the young married men who went to the south eighteen months ago and returned recently, have gone off again for another spell on the mines. In former years when they had to walk 240 miles to Tsumeb, this was a big undertaking, and few did it more than once or twice in a lifetime. Now they are carried in lorries and when they have been back 3 or 4 months, they go off once more.²⁴⁴

Increasing numbers of contracts were taken up by the same migrants, spending less time in Ovamboland between contracts.

Another factor promoting repeated labour migration is suggested in the mission and colonial discourse on changes in Ovambo familial structure. Early official reports asserted that the bulk of migrants were unmarried men;²⁴⁵ by the late 1920s young married men assumed a higher profile in the migrant group. According to missionaries in Oukwanyama, the migration of young married men frequently resulted in the break-up of their newly established households.

It is hard when a young married man has to leave home to go to work in the mines. It generally means the home is broken up and the woman goes to live with her mother at some other kraal.²⁴⁶

Such missionary assumptions have been questioned elsewhere in Africa. One study in southern Tanganyika for example argues that assistance from the migrant husband's kin to the wife reduced the impact of his absence. Gulliver

²⁴³ Tsumeb Museum, Ilse Schatz (ed.), *Tsumeb zu OMEGs Zeiten* (unpublished manuscript, n.d.), No 3, Kartsveld Gebiet.

²⁴⁴ *OMQP* No 32, July 1937.

²⁴⁵ NAN RCO 2/1916/1, RC Ovamboland - Secretary Protectorate, 27.3.1918.

²⁴⁶ *OMQP* No 5, April 1930.

asserts that migrant labour did not lead to divorce, except in cases of very long absence.²⁴⁷

While it is important to 'unpack' mission assumptions about the impact of labour migration on marriage, the social organisation in Ovamboland differed in fundamental respects from the patrilineal and patrilocal Ngoni in Tanganyika. In the case of matriliney and matrilocality, married women arguably had access to matriclan assistance when the husband migrated, which would also undermine the mission view that migrant labour encouraged divorce. But in the Ovambo case, when residence after marriage was patrilocal, the picture becomes more complicated.

Intensive research would be necessary to explore the finer implications of the combination of matriliney and patrilocality in Ovamboland. The impression to emerge on the basis of limited evidence is that patrilocal residence may have worked against support for young wives with absent husbands, while matrilineal ideology supported them if they chose to return to their matriclan. As one Ovambo proverb puts it, 'Even the wife of Kalunga left him.'²⁴⁸ There remains a case for arguing that in these decades women had relatively strong access to divorce compared with patrilineal societies, where *lobola* and the claims of the patriclan on the offspring of the marriage posed greater obstacles.

This perspective is supported by Catholic mission evidence from the similarly labour-exporting region of Ongambwe in Angola.²⁴⁹

Young pagan men emigrate easily enough to the Damaraland mines, where they go to earn a bit of money. Certain of our newly-weds imitate them. But it happens that on returning, the

²⁴⁷ P.H. Gulliver, *Labour Migration in a Rural Economy. A Study of the Ngoni and Ndendeuli of Southern Tanganyika* (Kampala, 1955), pp 37-40.

²⁴⁸ Mallory, 'Aspects of Mission Policy.' Kalunga is the name of the Ovambo deity.

²⁴⁹ The Ngambwe were similar to the Ovambo in that they were matrilineal (see Estermann, *Etnografia*, Vol 1, p 26) and followed a system of patrilocal residence (see Estermann, *Etnografia*, Vol 2, p 81).

wife is no longer to be found, for she too has gone to seek her fortune elsewhere.²⁵⁰

Outside commentators on pre-colonial and pre-Christian Ovambo societies noted the ease with which wives could leave their husbands and obtain divorce. Erosion of divorce through Christianisation appears to have been a slow process.²⁵¹ Fifteen and twenty years after mission work among the Kwanyama at Odibo, young Christian wives were still frequently abandoning their newly-established households and husbands.²⁵² The similarly matrilineal Ngambwe also retained strong access to divorce in the early 1930s, despite the growth of Christianity.²⁵³

This is not to propose that desertion or access to divorce was an unproblematic alternative for young wives, whether Ngambwe or Ovambo. Among the former, wives often returned to their husbands upon his payment of a 'gift' to the parents.²⁵⁴ Conclusions concerning ease of divorce and vulnerability of younger households due to migrant labour must remain tentative. The relevant point is that if newly established households did break up while the husband migrated, further time and income from migrant labour may well have been needed for their reconstruction. This suggests the development of a cyclical process in which expectation of establishing a household was pushed further away, forcing migrant labour on to the market again and deferring the peasant option. The vulnerability of this group of younger men in terms of access to resources in times of ecological and economic pressure, resulted in their firmer displacement into the formal migrant labour system, taking the form of recurring contracts. This intensified the process of permanent semi-proletarianisation.

²⁵⁰ BG 35 1931-31, p 377.

²⁵¹ NAN NAO Vol 9 2/12, OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 11.2.1937; OC Oshikango - NC Ovamboland, 22.2.1938; Wolfe, *Thirst belt*, p 21.

²⁵² OMQP No 5, April 1930.

²⁵³ BG 35 1931, p 377.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

'Proletarianisation' in its full sense was not an option: labour migrants could not settle outside Ovamboland. A welter of colonial legislation prohibited this. Not only did the labour system push contract workers back to Ovamboland, kinship obligations and authoritarian pressures also drew men back to Ovamboland. Pressure was particularly exerted by headmen to prevent migrants remaining in the south. Punishments were meted out to those who remained for long periods. Motivations for this pressure may have been linked to labour needs, quite apart from the *pandulo* brought back by migrants. Ideological reasons were probably also important, in an adapted tributary mode of production for the benefit of the dominant. It was within these parameters and those of kinship that most migrants attempted to establish households.

The spread of Christianity poses questions about the implications of monogamy for domestic labour and productivity. In Ovamboland the agricultural system was still dominated by hoe cultivation. Polygyny and bridewealth, as Boserup has argued, are strong features in the relationships between the sexual division of labour, marriage systems and types of agricultural production, in societies where hoe agriculture predominates and women perform most agricultural work.²⁵⁵ The internal stratification which characterised Ovambo societies had implications for polygyny. Poorer sections had been *de facto* monogamous, even at the time of the arrival of the FMS in 1870.²⁵⁶ Hahn did not concede the possibility of this when he attacked the role of the FMS in the decline of the Ndonga domestic economy:

In Ondonga big native kraals, surrounded by large fields, as in other tribes, are practically non-existent...[T]he big tribal kraals... have gradually split up into numerous smaller ones occupied by so-called Christians, semi-Christians and half-civilised natives... This tribe has also suffered economically. The lack of cohesion caused by the breaking up of the big kraals, which were practically economically independent units, has resulted in the

²⁵⁵ Ester Boserup, *Women's Role*, p 50.

²⁵⁶ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Kivinen - Secretary SWA, 8.3.1937.

production of less food, and the impoverishment of the people.²⁵⁷

This perception ignored a myriad of socio-economic changes. The processes of incorporation of Ovamboland, firstly into the mercantile capitalist orbit and then into the labour market dominated by mining capital, had not necessarily caused but certainly influenced the growth of a stratum of younger men lacking the resources to establish independent households. This implied a high rate of households with a low number of wives. The FMS pointed out the relevance of social differentiation:

The economic problem is not solved neither [sic] by the heathen polygamy. Everybody, who has learned to know Ovamboland, knows that former times only the chiefs and headmen had many wives. The largeness of their kraals and their riches did not depend on the number of wives only. In addition they got booty in their plundering, etc. People like those are not poor even at present and are not the first ones to starve.²⁵⁸

Caution is therefore necessary in attributing a great impact on domestic production to Christianisation.

Meillassoux has been criticised for treating women as a homogeneous category, for inadequate discussion of social differentiation between women.²⁵⁹ Wives of older men were less affected by labour migration, not only because their husbands were less likely to migrate, but because they could command the labour of younger male and female kin, or that of junior wives in a polygamous household. A senior mother-in-law was not in the same position *vis-à-vis* male kin, or indeed *vis-à-vis* other women, as a young bride. As Moore argues, it must be recognised how the circumstances of women's lives changed as they grew older.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁷ NAN NAO Vol 13 6/2/5 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 27.8.1935.

²⁵⁸ NAN NAO Vol 11 6/1/1, Kivinen - Secretary SWA, 8.3.1937.

²⁵⁹ Henrietta Moore, *Feminism and Anthropology* (Cambridge, 1988), p 51.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

Migrant labour 1929-31: decreasing room for manoeuvre

This chapter closes with an overview of conditions in which labour migrated in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The new pattern of recurrence resulted in migrant labour becoming more structurally entrenched at the same time as significant disadvantages appeared in labour conditions. The onset of depression reduced the employment in mines. For the first time the administration gave precedence to the labour requirements of the white farming sector.²⁶¹ This implied significantly lower wages, isolation at the workplace, with less scope for group action against exploitation and abuse. In addition, improved transport facilitated the spread of infectious diseases which affected both migrant labour and the rural population.²⁶²

Up to 1930 the earlier trends of shortage for the labour market continued. As mentioned, the 1927 reduction in Kwanyama migrant labour had caused concern. Then, in 1930, a great turn-around in the labour situation was tersely indicated in the Administrator's Report for 1930:

During the year under review, owing to the world-wide depression, there was a considerable shrinkage in mining operations and for the first time for many years there has been an excess in the supply of labour over the demand, necessitating the curtailment of recruiting in Ovamboland and the Okavango regions.²⁶³

Because of the 1929-31 famine and state responses to it, in 1930 district administrations all over SWA launched road construction projects to provide labour and ensure that financial remittances reached famine-stricken

²⁶¹ Emmett, 'Rise of African Nationalism,' pp 319-23, 332-3, 336-7.

²⁶² For background on diseases see NAN DSO MO 2/4, Selma Rainio, Tuberkulöse in Ovamboland, 30.8.1924; DSO MO 5/1, Annual Health Reports Ovamboland, 1927-9; Johannes Hendrik Loots, 'The health conditions of the native populations in Ovamboland, and its bearing on the development of South-West-Africa' (MD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1930), p 15.

²⁶³ Union of South Africa, *Annual Report* 1930, p 91.

Ovamboland. The real turn-around in labour demand from the mining sector was initially masked by public works projects.

An intersection of internal and external pressures now worked against migrant workers' interests. Faced with the spate of new difficulties and disadvantages, they intensified efforts to work the system to their own gain. This meant stronger attempts to reach preferred work sites, if possible avoiding the institutionalised *régime* of the contract labour system. It also took the shape of sporadic worker militancy at labour centres, though this already had a long history.²⁶⁴ This is not to extract selective evidence of 'resistance', which would miss the subtleties of responses: the limits to which choice could be exercised reveals something about the goals of those men who migrated from Ovambo to work in the south and lends texture to the pressures in rural sending areas.

For example, in 1929-30 it appears that potential labour migrants avoided migrating south altogether and obtained food from their wives working on the dams. It was strongly suspected that women were hiding the fact that men, especially their husbands, might not be working at all times. Supervisors had told relief workers that if their husbands were not willing to work, or were returning from the south, their wives were not allowed to work. Finnish mission personnel supervising dam work for the administration argued that to enforce this was impossible.²⁶⁵ At one dam in Ondonga there were 500 to 600 women working daily, not always the same individuals. Supervisors had no way of knowing which women's husbands had not gone to work and found that when making enquiries, 'people do not speak the truth.'²⁶⁶ Other supervisors employed by the Ovambo administration found:

²⁶⁴ See Moorsom, 'Formation', pp 96-7; Gordon, 'Note on the History', pp 7-11.

²⁶⁵ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, Alho - Hahn, 31.10.1930.

²⁶⁶ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, NC Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 15.11.1930.

they can only go by what the women tell them when questioned about their husbands, i.e. whether they are at work in the south or sitting at kraals, and they have not the means at their disposal to check these statements.²⁶⁷

Headmen and foremen on dams were also largely unable to monitor 'the whereabouts of the able-bodied men'.²⁶⁸ At least part of the reluctance to migrate was due to unfavourable labour conditions. The nature of work available and fluctuations in particular labour demands were important factors.

Administrative preoccupations remained centred on control of labour, in this epoch portrayed as necessary to the economy of famine relief. Officials in Ovambo protested at the re-employment of expired contractees from Luderitz at northern mines. Hahn telegraphed Windhoek to insist that the northern mines should use newly-recruited labour:

If permitted continue this practice, will seriously diminish chances of local recruits going out to earn money while strong possibility exists that wages already earned will not reach this country at time when most urgently needed assist dependents.²⁶⁹

This policy did serve a need to bring cash into Ovamboland to purchase food relief.

Ovambo migrants had also been succeeding for some time in obtaining visiting passes to the south, 'where it was quite easy for them to get passes to look for work on stating that they have experienced delay and must earn money to enable them to return home.'²⁷⁰ In this way they were exercising more power of choice at labour centres, only possible when recognised labour

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, Telegram OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, ca April-June 1930.

²⁷⁰ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, OC NA Windhoek - NC Ovamboland, 30.4.1930; Administrator Windhoek - OC NA Tsumeb, 6.6.1930.

organisations were evaded.²⁷¹ Windhoek chivvied the Native Affairs staff in Tsumeb to interrogate all arriving migrants to ascertain who had visiting passes under false pretences. Those found guilty were to return to Ovambo or be contracted to one of the labour organisations.²⁷²

It was at this point, in June 1930, that the first intimations of unemployment emerged. 'There is an excess of labour in the towns at present and it is necessary to regulate further influx from outside.'²⁷³ Cope had stopped recruiting for the labour organisations. Men seeking work were offered employment with the road boards. Very few accepted, even when special recruiting efforts were made, because of low wages and the fact that food was excluded.²⁷⁴ When a small amount of work became available again on mines in September 1930, the Southern Labour Organisation absorbed this and road work was again shunned.²⁷⁵ Hahn considered Ovamboland to have been 'practically combed out', in as far as labour for public works was available. Such able-bodied men as remained were intensively engaged in 'work necessary to sustain tribal life'. This was primarily watering and herding cattle, the opening up of new wells and the cleaning of the old.²⁷⁶

Even the less physically fit attempted to get work on the mines. This was a measure of the vulnerability of marginal sectors - the old and ailing - affected by famine and weakened support networks. The Chamber of Mines in Luderitz Bay complained to the chief Medical officer in Windhoek that they had had to repatriate 43 workers 'owing to long-standing ailments, senility and pronounced physical defects.'²⁷⁷

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, Administrator Windhoek - OC NA Tsumeb, 6.6.1930.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.9.1930; OC NA Ovamboland - Strachan, 2.9.1930.

²⁷⁵ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.9.1930.

²⁷⁶ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Secretary SWA, 18.9.1930.

²⁷⁷ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, Chamber of Mines Luderitzbucht - Medical Officer Windhoek, 20.8.1930.

However, those who did resort to road labour barely contained their dissatisfaction with the conditions, and felt impelled to leave as soon as prospects in Ovamboland improved. In February 1931, a dispute brewed over terms dictated to these workers by white gang supervisors, who tried to enforce 'contract' periods.²⁷⁸ This gave workers the impression that another six or twelve months work at very low pay was required. The Ovambo foremen argued that Hahn's office had recruited the workers on the understanding that it was famine work to relieve their dependents in Ovamboland. Hahn supported their objections to the imposition of longer terms at such low pay.

It was an ongoing tussle for better conditions at work, with recourse to the NC, in a worsening scenario of unemployment and choice of workplace. One symptom of this decreasing room for manoeuvre was the intensification of overt labour resistance. But this, as well as new forms of political consciousness, is the stuff of further theses.

²⁷⁸ NAN NAO Vol 3 2/1 v 1, OC NA Ovamboland - Strachan, 6.2.1931.

CONCLUSION

In 1929 the Administrator for SWA complained that Ovamboland was going on 'forever in the old rut'.¹ From the colonial point of view, the region still had a heavily armed population, taxation had not been introduced and labour migration had been consistently lower than demand. That year too saw a food crisis. Implicit in all this was an assumption that the incorporation of Ovamboland into the colonial economy had barely altered the region.

In fact, Ovamboland had changed subtly but substantially. The first half of the 1930s were years which marked a new phase in the reorientation of Ovamboland from a relatively self-sufficient region into one increasingly dependent on the export of labour. That was the terminal point of the thesis. Its conclusion will look back across the history of the region, showing how the situation in the 1930s had its genesis in the previous half-century and the more distant Ovambo past. Social transformations were slow in taking shape, often doing so only partially. This graduated change was due both to external and internal factors.

The limited terms on which Ovamboland was integrated into the sub-regional economy, through migrant labour alone, made the penetration of capitalism a very slow process of percolation. Colonial policy deliberately sought to limit the degree of administrative integration with the rest of SWA; Ovamboland's physical remoteness helped. Thus capitalism was filtered through the controls of administrative and labour organisational structures, as well as those pre-colonial institutions which had been left intact after colonial occupation. Colonialism was still a very shallow experience by the late 1920s.

¹ NAN NAO Vol 40 34/1 v 1, Administrator's meeting re prospective famine conditions in Ovamboland, 9.2.1929.

Institutions embedded in the social formation itself posed obstacles to rapid and clear-cut reorientation under the pressures of capitalism. The most important was matriliney, though it must be emphasised that capitalism very gradually pressured matriliney itself. Lineage relations operated very powerfully too; this was particularly evident in famine recovery, when young male labour was withdrawn from the capitalist market to contribute towards the reconstruction of the household economy. Crises such as famine showed the strength of these underlying dynamics of social organisation.

Some of the forms taken by gender dominance in Ovamboland also controlled the impact of capitalism. Specifically, these prevented women from taking advantage of new opportunities offered by selling their labour outside the region. Colonial authorities supported demands by Ovambo male elders and rulers to stop women from moving outside the homestead. The only women who were able to gain access to the labour market were those who had left Ovamboland before South African occupation and were already in the south by 1915.

The cushioned impact of capitalism, when compared with the experience of the Herero and Nama, for example, can be attributed to lack of land dispossession in Ovamboland. But colonialism had its land dimension in the north. Boundary demarcation with Angola directly affected land settlement. In the short term it disrupted production and the flow of migrant labour; in the long term it affected Kwanyama and western settlement and reduced the pastoral options of more southern polities. Though many Kwanyama chose to settle on the Angolan side when they foresaw scarcity in 1929, demarcation increased pressure on existing space and resources on the SWA side. The experience of compression was not confined to the Kwanyama. Interstitial areas between polities were shrinking, increasing the number of boundary disputes. These forest areas offered resources for fuelwood and foraging; their shrinkage had implications for proneness to

famine and the intensity of scarcity experienced by the vulnerable during famine. These factors also tied in with labour migration.

Problems of compression and encroachment by households on interstitial forest had as much to do with settlement patterns under colonialism as with any reductionist notion of population growth. It could be an intensely political issue, as in the Kwambi case of 1923. Pre-colonial Ovambo kings had dealt with demographic growth and the spread of settlement through periodical renegotiation. The authority to do so now was brokered through administrative officials; although repressing conflict, this may also have delayed the process of renegotiation. The need to solve Kwanyama land shortage led to the administrative organisation of completely new settlement in the eastern areas later in the 1930s and 1940s.

The maintenance of pre-colonial political structures through a cost-efficient system, which later came to be formulated as indirect rule, transformed the position of rulers. Colonial backing altered the basis of their social authority; particularly where headmen replaced kings, Ovambo ruling institutions became increasingly authoritarian. This came into sharper focus during the 1929-30 famine. The first to challenge this authority were new strata, mainly educated Christians, but also 'police boys' in administrative employ.

Colonialism from 1915 built very much on earlier inequalities. The pre-colonial internal dynamic of Ovambo polities, particularly in the east, owed much to the 'revolutionary impact' of merchant capital. In the period under study, the impact of merchant capital was more profound than that of mining or industrial capitalism. Whereas merchant capitalism had swept, later capitalism seeped into Ovamboland. The results of mercantile penetration were ambivalent for colonialism. Access to weaponry made leaders powerful in the face of colonial occupation, but absorption into the mercantile frontier intensified social stratification which facilitated labour migration.

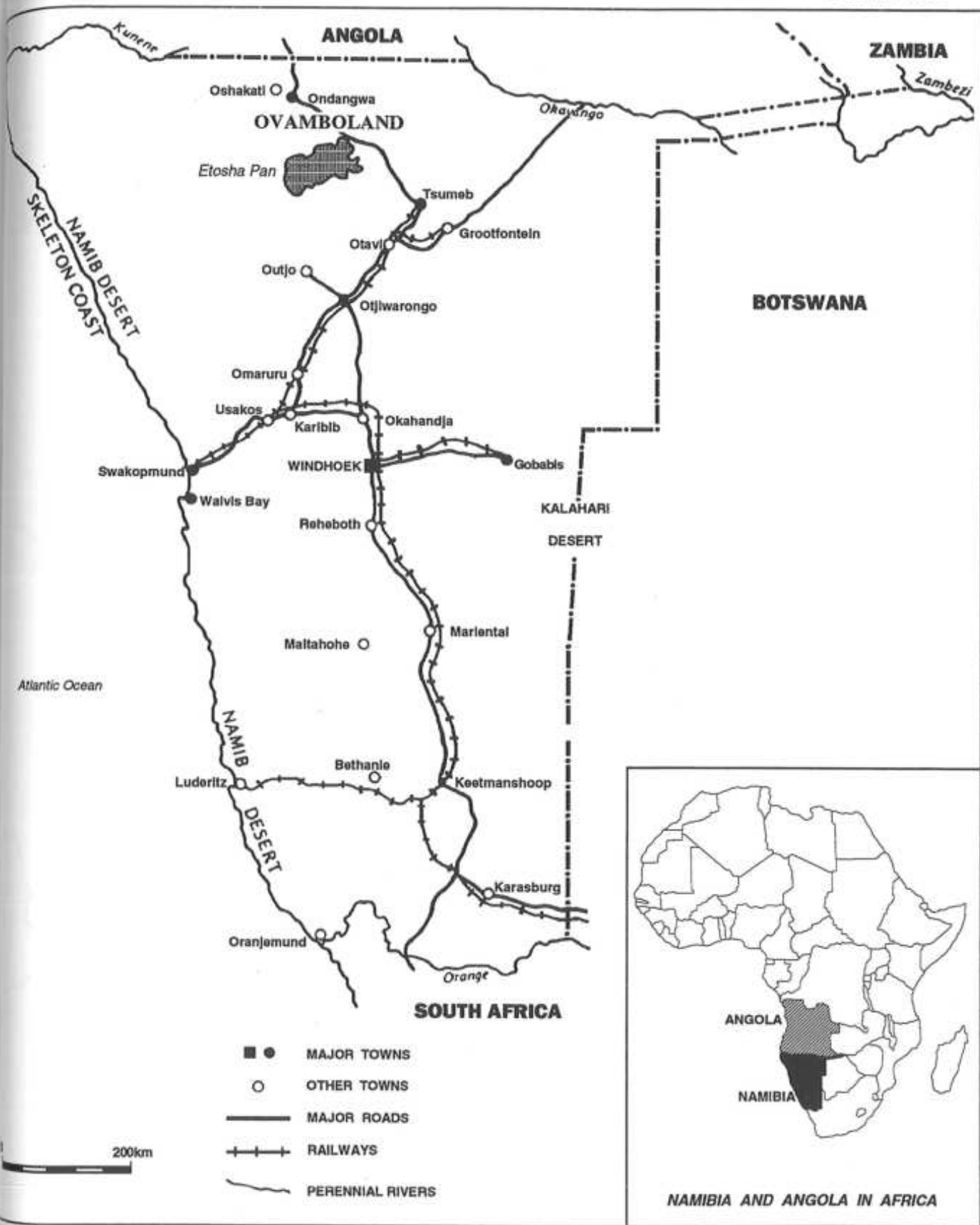
The 'parasitic quality' of merchant capital both reinforced and transformed pre-colonial systems, particularly between the 1880s and 1910s. It especially fuelled proto-class tensions among the *élite*, now competing for the allegiance of adherents who faced greater opportunities for social mobility. These processes were more intense in Oukwanyama, the polity which acted as the main Ovambo interface with Angolan merchant capital. The latter was dominated by the slave-trade, after the tusk frontier had retreated into the deep hinterland of eastern Angola. Kwanyama reorientation under merchant capital was characterised by greater violence. They were the most active in raiding neighbouring polities in southern Angola for cattle and captives to sell to middlemen in the trade network with the Angolan coast. Internally, slaves were among adherents that the *élite* competed within itself to accumulate. On the other side of the coin, raided communities were weakened. These were located in southern Angola and western Ovamboland, and struggled to defend themselves in the face of more numerous and superior arms in the hands of the raiders.

Within the more powerful eastern polities, competition for new resources available under merchant capital gave tremendous weight to decentralising pulls by *omalenga*. This undermined central kingship in both Ondonga and Oukwanyama. In the latter case it stimulated a discourse on the social merits of strong centralised kingship, which matched a period of reforms under Mandume ya Ndemufayo. These struggles at the level of the *élite* were symptomatic of intensified political stresses brought on by incorporation into the mercantile frontier.

But Ovambo states had long been characterised by struggles over centralisation in an altogether different sense. Kingship and the centralised tributary system layered over lineage relations. The latter remained a powerful undertow in society; production was centred on family homesteads. The organisation of production cannot be disconnected from the physical

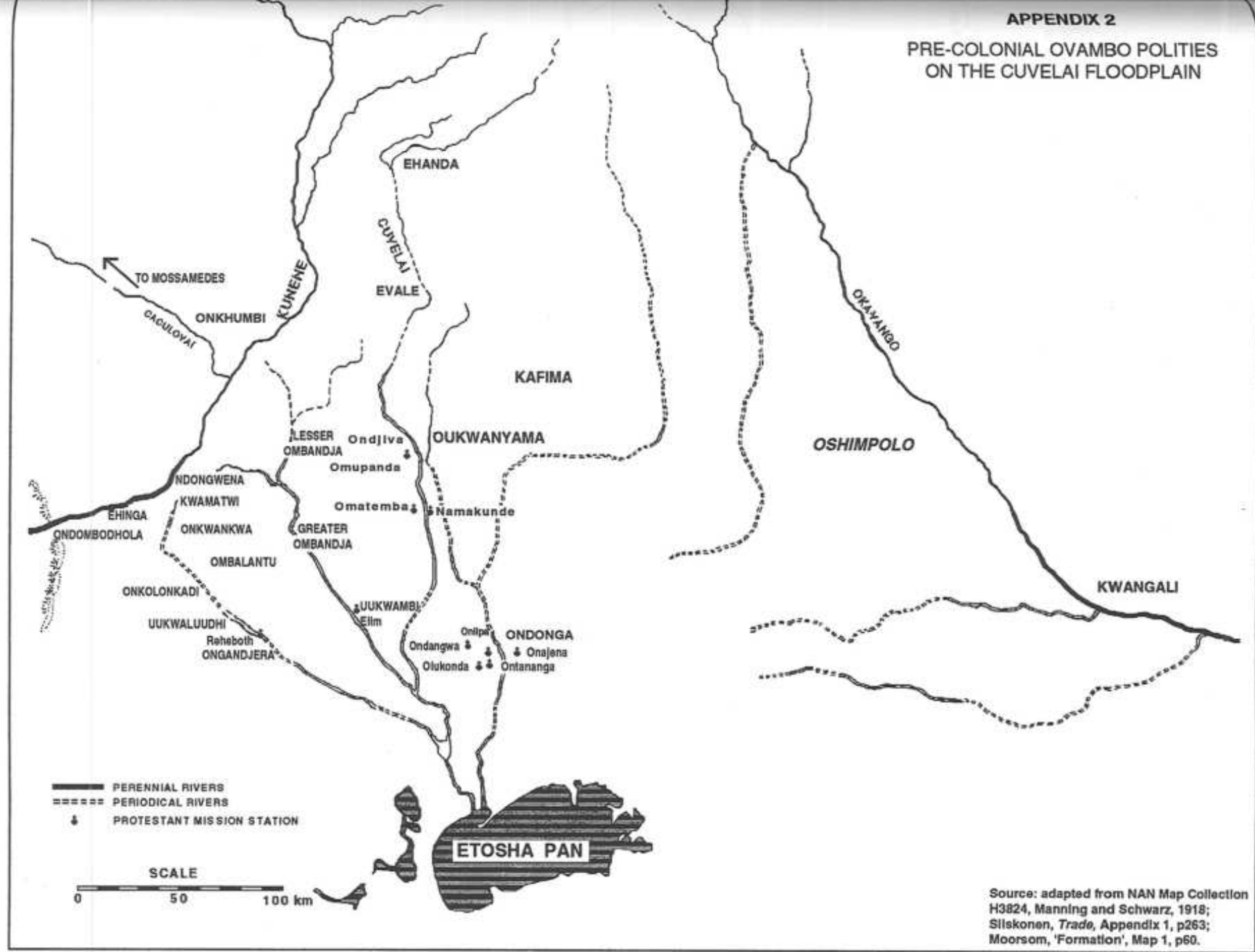
environment, the theme with which the thesis opened. Density of population on the floodplain area, especially in the concentrated eastern parts on the main *oshana*, led to pressures to centralise the social organisation in order to facilitate the complex human interaction with the environment. Central control synchronised important phases in production, regulated conservation measures, but above all mediated with spiritual powers who were believed to provide rain. Centralisation thus also took strong hold in the realm of ideology and religious beliefs. Deeper exploration of oral tradition - especially of origins - might well reveal contested areas of history in pre-colonial Ovambo discourse between kingship and lineages.

APPENDIX 1
NAMIBIA 1990



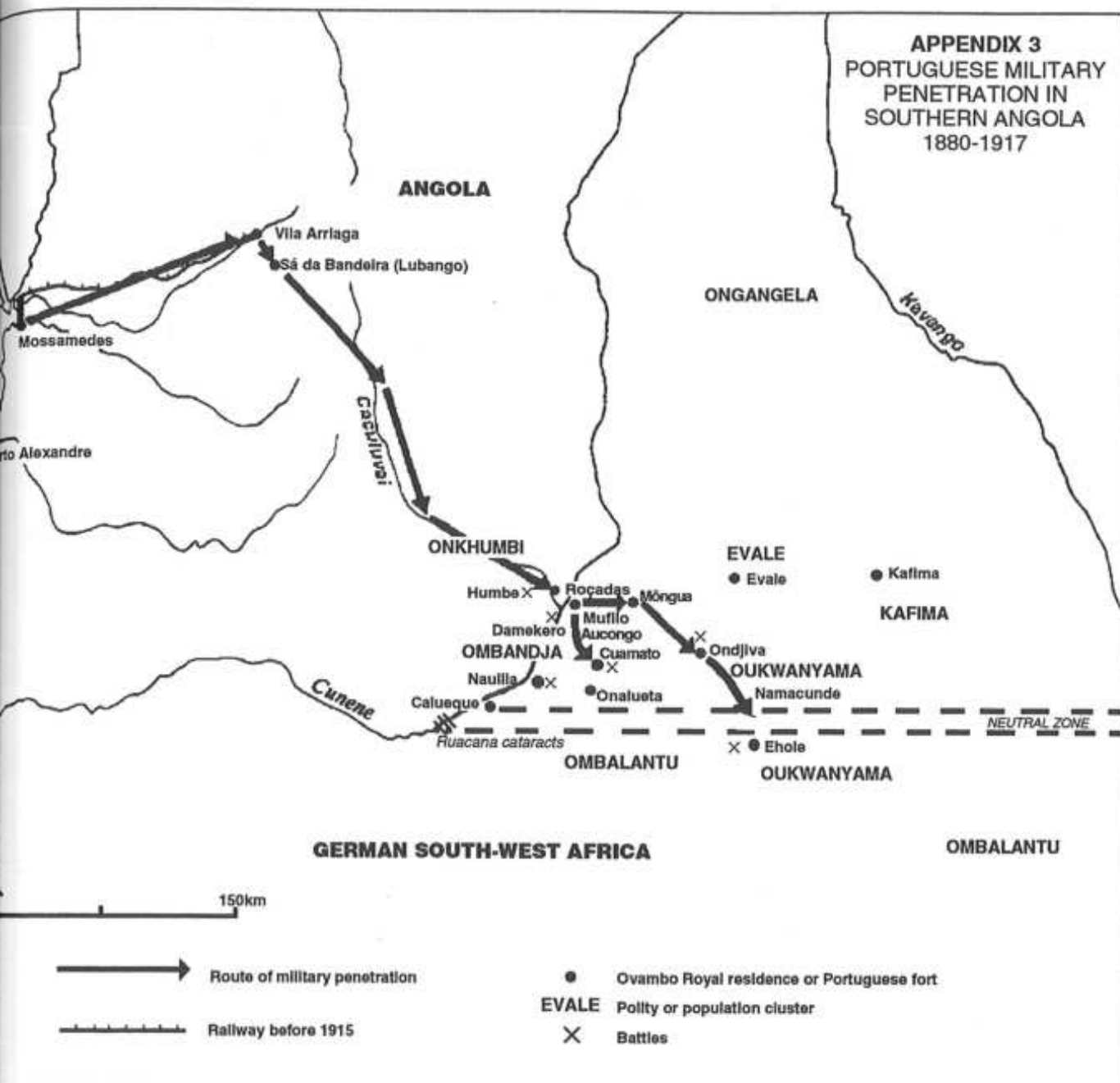
SOURCE: Idaf

PRE-COLONIAL OVAMBO POLITIES
ON THE CUVELAI FLOODPLAIN



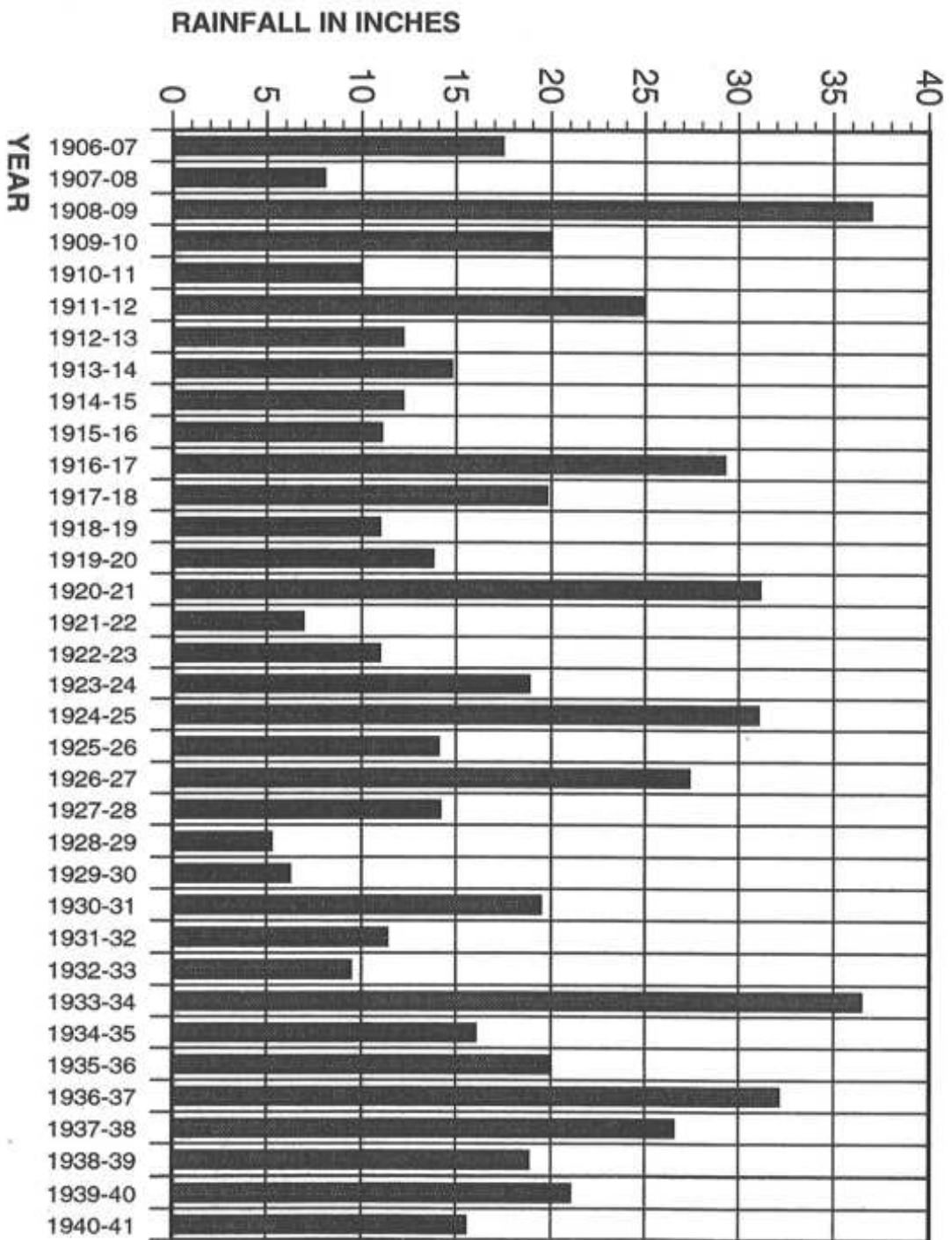
Source: adapted from NAN Map Collection H3824, Manning and Schwarz, 1918; Silskonen, *Trade*, Appendix 1, p263; Moorsom, 'Formation', Map 1, p60.

**APPENDIX 3
PORTUGUESE MILITARY
PENETRATION IN
SOUTHERN ANGOLA
1880-1917**



SOURCE: Adapted from Pélissier, 'Mandume', p. 213.

APPENDIX 5
 RAINFALL AT ONDANGUA FROM 1906 TO 1940-41



Source: NAN A450, C.H.L. HAHN papers Vol 8 2/26

APPENDIX 6

**COMPLETE LIST OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH
ORAL INFORMANTS IN OVAMBOLAND 1989-90**

The forty-one interviews listed below were all conducted by the author. With the exception of David Haufiku's interview and sections of the Petrus Ndongo interviews, all were conducted in Ovambo languages with an interpreter. All the interviews were recorded except six, due to technical failures; in all cases detailed notes were taken during interviews. Eleven recorded interviews have been fully transcribed into English. The following list of informants has been arranged according to location in the historically recognised districts of Ovamboland. Those marked with an asterisk are included in the transcriptions in Appendix 7.

<i>Name of informant</i>	<i>Date of interview</i>	<i>Ward resident</i>
<i>Oukwanyama:</i>		
1. Vilho Kaulinge	20.4.89	Ondobe
*2. -----	30.9.89	Ondobe
3. -----	24.3.90	Ondobe
4. Julia Mbida	21.4.89	Odibo
5. Petrus Ndongo	23.11.89	Odibo
6. Naikaku	16.9.89	Eembahu
7. Kapolo	16.9.89	Eembahu
*8. Josua Hamamudibo	17.9.89	Ondobe
9. Johannes Shikuma	17.9.89	Ondobe
10. Julia Shuuyadiva	17.9.89	Ondobe

11. Johannes Shihepo	7.10.89	Akwenyanga
*12. -----	28.10.89	Akwenyanga
*13. Alina Heita	11.10.89	Onamukulo
14. David Haufiku	28.12.89	Ongwediva
15. Nathanael Nghatanga	3.3.90	Okaku

Ondonga:

*16. Adolf Ambambi	23.9.89	Oshigambo
*17. Jeremia Benjamin	2.10.89	Oshigambo
18. Alexander Michael	2.11.89	Omaalala
19. Konis Imene	4.11.89	Onampadhi
Aune Shaningwa		
20. Tomas Kalumbu	5.11.89	Okadiina
21. -----	15.11.89	Okadiina
22. Hans Namuhuya	18.11.89	Oniipa
23. Elifas Shindondola	20.11.89	Oniipa
24. Andreas Uukule	22.11.89	Onyaanya
25. Hekkia Amwele	6.3.90	Okaku
26. Johanna Auene	28.2.90	Oshigambo

Uukwambi:

27. Sr Credula Ungwanga	6.7.89	Oshikuku
*28. Rev Jason Amakatuwa	26.9.89	Elim
Petrus Eelu		
Aromas Ashipala		
Jason Ambole		
Vilho Tshilongo		
29. Rev Jason Amakutuwa	29.9.89	Elim
Aromas Ashipala		

Jason Ambole
Vilho Tshilongo

Okalongo:

30. Rev Lukas Dama	29.10.89	Okalongo
31. William Set	29.10.89	Okalongo
*32. Sheetekela	27.12.89	Okalongo
Rev Lukas Dama		
33. Olavi Twamoneni	29.12.89	Okalongo

Ongandjera:

34. Petrus Amutenya	28.9.89	Okahau
35. -----	8.10.89	Okahau

Uukwaludhi:

36. Maria Embumbulu	28.9.89	Onghiila
37. Maria Shoombe	27.9.89	

Ombalantu:

38. Titus Iita	3.11.89	Nakayale
39. Rev Simpson Ndatipo	3.11.89	Nakayale
40. Modestus Andowa	4.11.89	Anamulenge
41. Simeon Heita	20.2.90	Onawa

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Small sections of the holdings of the Administrator for SWA (SWAA) were consulted and are listed below, as are the files of the District Surgeon Ovamboland (DSO).

- SWAA - Administrator for South West Africa
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- DSO - District Surgeon Ovamboland, 1923-1930 (find aid 1/1/67)
 - MO 2 Infectious diseases
 - MO 3 Correspondence Missions
 - MO 5/1 Annual Medical Reports 1924-30

The relevant files on Ovamboland during the period of German rule are located in the holdings of the Zentralbureau des kaiserlichen Gouvernements (ZBU), find-aid 1/1/1. Documents consulted are listed below:

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Note: In the notebooks of William C. Chapman (A 233), very large sections are unpaginated. Most page references are my own; where sections are not in clear sequence these have remained unpaginated and only the volume number is cited.

3. Map collection

- H 3824
- H 3841

Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Lisbon, Portugal

This immensely rich archive had no comprehensive inventory or catalogue of its African holdings at the time of research. However, José Curto has compiled a very useful typescript list of Angolan holdings up to 1915, which is available in the archive. (See José C. Curto, 'The Angolan Manuscript Collection of the Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino, Lisbon: Towards a Working Guide,' *History in Africa*, Vol 15, 1988, pp 163-89.) The only files consulted which were not on this list were those of the Companhia de Mossamedes. These are located in Sala 6 of the Palácio de Éga in Lisbon, where the archives are housed.

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**Archive of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS),
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- International Missionary Council, Africa, Box 1232
 (G)SWA, German Missions General 1913/24
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