

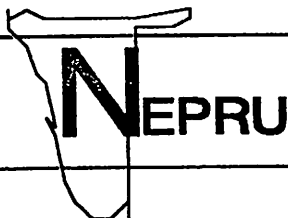
**From Reserve to Homeland: South African  
"Native" Policy in Southern Namibia**

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Reinhart Kössler

From reserve to homeland:  
South African 'native' policy in Southern Namibia<sup>1)</sup>

The beginning of South African rule in present-day Namibia<sup>2</sup> marks an important watershed in the country's history. The new developments initiated by the change in colonial rulers have generally been underestimated in existing literature. In the face of the overriding fact that colonial domination continued for another nearly 75 years, the change of the ruling power has been considered as little more than mere window-dressing, whereas colonial domination and exploitation persisted. The pre-eminence of the issue of the Mandate and the 'trust betrayed' have largely superseded nearly all other issues relevant to Namibia up to independence. Given the country's particular position in international relations, this is quite understandable. After independence, it is all the more important to take a closer look at the effects of the particular kind of colonial dispensation instituted by South Africa during one of the longest periods of colonial rule on the African continent. Not least for the indigenous people of Namibia, besides the mere fact of colonial dominance, the modalities of that dominance and the policies put into effect to attain colonialist aims were of importance in evaluating their position and in mapping out their own approach to deal with a situation, manifestly not of their own making.

When on 19 July 1915, the last units of the German *Schutztruppe* surrendered to the South African expeditionary corps at Khorab in the far North of the Police Zone, the area to the North of Keetmanshoop, including the regions of Berseba and Gibeon, had been secured by South African forces already since 19/27 of April (cf. Lenssen 1972, p. 238). The change of rulers found the indigenous people of southern Namibia in quite divergent conditions, due mainly to their extremely variegated fates after the great rising of 1904-06. Most of the indigenous groups had been stripped of their land. This happened to all but the Berseba people who had kept aloof from the rising, the Bondelswarts who had exacted a treaty from the German colonial power leaving them in possession of a portion of their old realm, and the Red Nation at Hoachanas who were left in precarious possession of their old tribal centre and a small area surrounding it. All other indigenous groups south of Rehoboth had been dispossessed of their lands, and in particular the Witboois, considered as a spearhead of the rising in the South, had been deported to various places both inside and outside of Namibia.

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<sup>1</sup> The following paper forms part of a research project under the title of "Nationale Integration und lokale Identitäten in Namibia" conducted under the auspices and funding of Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Schwerpunkt "Die Transformation der Ausbreitung Europas vom 16. bis 20. Jahrhundert" 1994-1996 at the Institute of Sociology, University of Münster, Germany. Translations from the German and Afrikaans are my own. I would like to thank in particular the leaders of the traditional communities my study was mainly concerned with, Chief Johannes Isaak, Chief Stephanus Goliath and *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi. I am also deeply grateful to the people, mainly in Berseba and Gibeon, who shared their experiences with me. It is a particular pleasure to gratefully acknowledge the forthcoming help and advice I received at the National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek and at the Archives of the Vereinigte Evangelische Mission, Wuppertal as well as the facilities put at my disposal at the State Archives at Cape Town and Pretoria. Last but not least, thanks are due to my friends in Windhoek for hospitality and company and to NEPRU for acting as my counterpart institution.

<sup>2</sup> In keeping with prevalent current usage, the country is referred to throughout as Namibia, even though its official colonial name at the period under discussion was South West Africa. The colonial designation is retained, however, in reference to institutions and laws and, of course, in direct quotations.



Various chains of events and developments which may be traced from the early times of South African occupation, and in some cases also from the great rising and its aftermath, are of great relevance even for the current post-independence situation. It is therefore with the intent to contribute towards a better understanding particularly of the current problems concerning traditional communities, in southern Namibia and in Berseba and Gibeon in particular, that I shall deal in greater detail with the formation and implementation of 'Native' policy under the South African dispensation and with the transformation of the former reserve concept into the homeland policy which was conceived, with respect to Namibia, under the Odendaal Plan in 1964 and carried through up to the formation of the homeland Namaland in 1975/79.

## 1. Initial steps in 'native policy': The quest for the mandate

Although prompted by the war situation, the South African military occupation of present-day Namibia was, from the beginning conceived as the conquest of a neighbouring territory which was pictured as having been occupied before by an inimical power and as the source of adverse influences for the adjacent Cape Colony. This view had been antedated by earlier considerations towards incorporation, voiced i.a. by General Smuts who served in British War Cabinets and as South African Prime Minister during the crucial stages leading up to the South African Mandate over Namibia (cf. du Pisani 1982, p. 281). Such designs had been re-enforced by the ill-fated and amateurish attempt of a German-orchestrated Boer rising during the opening weeks of the war and also by indications for German plans to expand their dominions in Southern Africa. Over and above such strategic considerations, Namibia was seen as a valuable asset, both on account of its mineral wealth and its agricultural potential, with particular reference to the southern parts, which opened up new areas for white settlement. Such settlement had already begun during 1916 and was actively promoted by the administrator put in charge of the Protectorate as it was styled during the intermediate period of formal military rule.<sup>3</sup> As André du Pisani has pointed out, these objectives have, from the very beginning, heavily tilted the scales against Namibian blacks, including those who had pinned their hopes on the South African intervention and takeover, or even had participated in the military campaign (cf. du Pisani 1989, p. 28).

South Africa was 'designated the mandatory power' with the concomitant responsibility to present an annual report on 7 May 1919 (cf. ib.). Technically, the country passed over under definite and internationally legitimate South African control only with the official proclamation of the League of Nations 'C' Mandate on 17 December 1920 (cf. Gill 1984, p. 11). This form of mandate was designed for former German territories which were not considered to be likely to pass into independence in the foreseeable future. For Namibia, the mandate construct was

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<sup>3</sup> cf. Report of the Administrator of the Protectorate of South West Africa for the Year 1916, p. 32 (SAB: GG 606: 9/59/143); E. H. L. Gorges [Administrator SWA] to Prime Minister Louis Botha, 21.1.1918 (SAB GG 728, enclosure to file 9/2693); letter of the same date in SAB: Smuts Private Papers A1 203, pp. 103ff; secret correspondence of the Governor General from the first half of 1918 in SAB GG 728, 9/269/3); Gorges to L. Botha, 31.1.1918 (SAB: Smuts Private Papers A1 203, pp. 103-107); L. Botha to J.C. Smuts, 26.2.1918 (Hancock/Poel 1966, No 815); Memoranda on the Constitution and Government of the Protectorate of South West Africa, 20.8.1918 (SAB: Smuts Public Papers A1 115. pp. 2ff); see also, e.g. South-West Africa, n.d.; generally, also for the following, see Wellington 1967, pp. 270ff; Hubrich/Melber 1977, pp. 59ff.

clearly seen, for many years, as a step towards incorporation of the territory into the Union (cf. du Pisani 1989, pp. 29ff; 1982, pp. 282ff).

Even before that, however, important basic decisions were reached which inevitably affected the indigenous population. These developments foreshadowed the tension that continued to exist for the coming decades between the overpowering interests of South Africa in the country and the local white interests basically linked to it on the one hand, and the tenuous checks contingent on the need for the South African administration both to appease and above all, to control, the indigenes and to answer in some ways to the queries that were voiced periodically, within the League of Nations framework.

This tension became apparent already while the war in Europe was still under way. It was very obvious during the period when the decision over the mandate was still pending. And it surfaced later in some minor ways, of which the administration of the reserves will be of particular topical interest here. South African diplomacy also put quite some effort into representing the case of South African administration of Namibia before the Permanent Mandates Commission. The same applies to the compilation of the annual reports. Two quotes from the chief architect of the mandate system, General Smuts, may illustrate this janus-faced approach: Writing for international public consumption in 1918, he claimed that the mandate meant 'a position of great trust and honour' and should not be looked upon by the mandatory 'as an office of profit or a position of private advantage for its nationals'. Even before the mandate had been finalized, in September 1920, he stressed, as Prime Minister of the Union, speaking in Windhoek, that 'the relations between the South West Africa Protectorate and the Union amount to annexation in all but name.'<sup>4</sup>

To secure the mandate, the South African authorities engaged in a sustained publicity campaign both inside and outside of Namibia. This encompassed even the 'native' majority in the country whom Governor General Lord Buxton addressed, on occasion of the first such visit in a tone of rather high promise while still making sure that 'natives' knew their place and their main function, work:

"... you cannot immediately escape the results of the last 30 to 40 years. As you have, however, conceded in your address, much has already been done to improve your living conditions, and towards increasing protection which you enjoy by law. As you say, the sjambok has been taken away. Now you have full rights over your stock which has increased in number. ...

'... Some of your demands could not be met, as they have come 20 to 30 years too late. But I can tell you that a lands commission will be appointed which will concern itself with all questions of land for natives as well as for European farmers. ...

'Your address reads that, with certain exceptions, the conditions obtaining under the German regime still prevail. That is, however, not the case. As I have already pointed out the present treatment of the natives is entirely different from that accorded them under the previous rule, and the longer this Territory is governed by the Union the greater the improvement will be.

'... It is to your advantage, and to the nation's, that you should work, and work well. It is also necessary for you to work, just as everybody else does, to earn his living. It is against your own interests to suffer in your midst those who are lazy and unwilling to work. The Government will protect you against maltreatment ... The Government will not

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<sup>4</sup> J.C. Smuts, *The League of Nations - A Practical Suggestion*, London 1918, pp. 11f and *Cape Times*, 16.9.1920, both quoted in du Pisani 1982, pp 282 and 283.

allow you to be deprived of wages and every justified complaint will always be heard in the magistrate's courts. But all this increases your duty to return service and good work.<sup>5</sup>

A salient feature of this campaign consisted in pointing out the harsh treatment meted out by the German authorities to the 'natives', and also their purported wish to come under British rule which was spelt implicitly as South African administration. Both strands figured prominently in the famous Blue Book on German (mal-)administration of the territory (cf. Report 1918). In his covering letter when sending the draft for the Blue Book to the South African Prime Minister, the Administrator, E.H.L. Gorges, squarely stated that this document had been compiled with the intention of 'giving reasons why from our point of view German South-West Africa should remain under British rule'. Rehearsing the strategic and geographical reasons for an annexation, Gorges added 'the danger of the existence just beyond the Union border of a native population in a constant state of dissatisfaction and unrest having close family ties ... with natives on the Union side of the line' and recalled the situation during the great Nama rising.<sup>6</sup> Achieving both control over and at least a modicum tolerable living conditions for the indigenes especially of Southern Namibia was thus sketched out as a rational policy choice on the side of South Africa for a whole number of reasons. The seriousness with which this policy was pursued, as well as the ulterior motives behind it, emerge clearly from a comment by Gorges on an incident of abuse perpetrated by a South African trooper against a Namibian:

'Great use was made in Paris of the Blue Book ... and the solemn declaration was made that the care of these helpless undeveloped people is to be one of the primary duties of the League of Nations and that the custody and tutelage of these people is to be given to a State which has shewn that it can exercise a conscience in the matter.

'It is our sincere desire that the control of this country will for all time shortly pass completely into the hands of the Union but whether the transfer will be effected without dissentient voices amongst the natives will depend entirely on the quality of the officials sent here to represent the Union. Chains and the liberal use of the sjambok by the Police will clearly not secure that clean sheet which I am so anxious to present when the existing Military Occupation of this country comes to an end.'<sup>7</sup>

Such attempts to curtail 'malpractices' could have very tangible effects for those who had been primarily affected by them. The same is true of the changes in the forms of control over the indigenous population. These were, as early as 1916, explicitly designed to bring 'the law into line with that in force in the native territories in the Union'<sup>8</sup>. Even a year before, the administrator had pointed to 'the practice of the Transvaal' as the basis for shaping his 'native policy'.<sup>9</sup> While stressing his administration's endeavours to prevent and punish any forms of 'personal assault' and to suppress 'parental control' formerly exercised by 'masters' over servants on account of 'unwritten law',<sup>10</sup> the administrator in his report for 1916, also candidly acknowledged continuity in the structural aspects of policy:

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<sup>5</sup> Lord Buxton's Speech to the Natives, 4.10.1919, transl from Allgemeine Zeitung; NAN:SWAA A 73/27/1 v2.

<sup>6</sup> Gorges to Botha, 21.1.1918; SAB: GG 728 9/269/3 (enclosure).

<sup>7</sup> Gorges to Acting Prime Minister, 8.4.1919 (NAN: ADM 567/6 v2); similarly, Gorges to J.C.Smuts, 11.12.1917 (SAB: Smuts Private Papers A1 200); Gorges's views were, however, not uncontested, see e.g., Col. Mentz to Minister of Defence J.C. Smuts, 24.8.1915, covering a statement by one Major Hunt (SAB: Smuts Public Papers A1: 112); L. Botha to Smuts 19.3.1918 (ib., A1 203, pp. 29ff)

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Administrator for 1916, l.c. p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> Administrator to Prime Minister, 1.4.1916 (Report for 1915); SAB: GG 606: 9/59/143.

<sup>10</sup> Report of the Administrator for 1916, l.c. ., p. 54.



\* 'The two main principles of the German Law - that every native must carry a means of identification and be in employment unless he has visible means of support remain in force ...'<sup>11</sup>

Changes concerned above all the substitution of brass badges by passes, the raising of the age from which passes were required to fourteen for men and the general exemption of women except when living in towns. Those to whom the pass law was applicable fell into three categories: those exempt on account of infirmity or of owning a number of stock considered sufficient for their maintenance, i.e. ten head of large or fifty head of small stock; those seeking work and those being employed. Refusal to take up employment would be punished under vagrancy laws.<sup>12</sup> While it is quite conceivable that the effect of these changes was to 'actually increase the efficiency of the state apparatus' (Silvester 1993, p. 32), the net effect of the change of rulers seems, at first at least, have been apt to raise hopes amongst the indigenes. In this, the provision of reserves, to be dealt with extensively below, had a major role to play.

There is no reason, then, to view either the indictments against German malpractices or the endeavours to formulate a 'native policy' for the newly acquired territory in the benign light which they ostensibly laid claim to.<sup>13</sup> Rather, they were part of a policy aimed at safeguarding and consolidating the war-time gains. There was therefore not a shift in policy after the finalization of the mandate as has been suggested (cf. Wellington 1967, pp. 275ff). The policy of adding Namibia to the realm of the Union had been successful and simply was moving onto a new stage. Quite certainly, indigene hopes had been raised by the propaganda campaign as well as by tangible gains made immediately after the South African occupation. They were described variously, with widely divergent evaluations, as a lessening of discipline, or 'new freedoms'.<sup>14</sup> Basically, such new freedoms consisted in a lessening of the control exercised over the movements of indigenes and in permitting them to keep large stock.<sup>15</sup> Hopes raised in this way were deeply frustrated once it became apparent that the new administration would build on the heritage of German colonialism. This turned out to be the case above all where access to the principal economic and symbolic resource was concerned, land. All acts of land alienation, and what is more, of the confiscation of tribal land during the German period were honoured by the new authorities. This forestalled any return to the position before 1904 as may have been hoped for by some communities. Together with the clear policy aimed towards increased settlement from South Africa, this also set a very narrow framework for a review of the 'native question' and in particular, of the question of reserves, that came under way from 1920 onwards.

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<sup>11</sup> *Ib.*, p. 56.

<sup>12</sup> *Cf. ib.*, pp. 57f.

<sup>13</sup> Therefore, a clarification of the goals and strategies of the administration and of the constraints under which they were pursued, as attempted here, seems more relevant than, if compatible with, a confrontation of 'liberal' tendencies with settler interests as presented by Gewalt 1996, p. 296ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Cf. Blumhagen 1934*, pp. 74ff; *Wellington 1967*, pp. 270f. See for the Witboois, *Kössler 1998*; on the 'Herero New Age', see *Gewald 1996*, pp. 288-294.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. *Gewald 1996*, p. 293; his stress on the alleviation of the labour problem by the effects of the famine in Ovambo 1915/16 certainly is not sustained by the evidence on the Southern farmin sector, i.a. in *NAN:ADM 567/2 v2*; see also *Herbst to Prime Minister, n.d. [end of 1919]*; *ib.*, on Ovambos being 'averse from accepting engagements with the farming community'.

The tension just mentioned was therefore also apparent in the 'native policy' actually pursued by the South African administration in Namibia. The momentary lessening of control did not forestall effective continuation of central aspects of German administration in the long run, concerning issues such as the division of the country into a Police Zone and Northern territories, a pass system but superficially altered, and the ban on private land ownership for 'natives' (see Bradford 1967, p. 89). In 1920, the Secretary for the Protectorate stressed that in terms of labour policy,

'under the German law, which law is still in force in this Protectorate, every native adult above the age of four[teen] years must be in service. There is therefore no possibi[lity] of such a Reserve becoming a home for idlers'<sup>16</sup>.

Consequently, the 'native policy' of the new administration was also marked, besides a deep inherent ambivalence, by a tilting of the scales. The scales were tilted very definitely in favour of the white farmers settled in the country and entering it under the auspices of the mandatory power. As far as the indigenous peoples were concerned, settler interests were centred around land, labour power and security.<sup>17</sup> While putting these interests foremost on its agenda, the new administration also had to cater for various additional objectives as well. These may be summarised in preserving a minimal measure of international legitimacy for the mandatory power, above all within the League of Nations framework. Linked to that was the quest for a minimum of legitimacy or consent on the side of the indigenes, increasingly so when the mandatory power was put to task for its failing development efforts on the international stage. Major Herbst, writing as Secretary for the Protectorate in late 1919, pointed out that there was

'already considerable agitation among the natives ... they will sooner or later undoubtedly get into communication with members of Parliament in the Union and elsewhere to press their claims.'

Such outside allies for the 'natives' seemed quite concrete to Herbst added who that Senator Schreiner was

'already ... in active communication with the Hereros on this matter and has represented to the Administrator the necessity of withdrawing the forced labour provisions of the existing law.'

\* { At the same time, Herbst stressed that while German laws were 'foreign to our traditions', strict control over existing reserves and vigorous police action should suffice to control 'a native population so small in numbers'.<sup>18</sup>

This ambivalence became evident from the very beginning of South African control in Namibia. The military administration which was incumbent from 1915 to the finalization of the mandate, pursued, vis-à-vis the 'natives', a dual objective: As mentioned, there was a measure of propaganda present in setting current administrative practice off against the brutal German usages. But at the same time, the administration was adamant in safeguarding its control over the indigenous population and in ensuring an adequate supply of labour force for a settler agriculture. At the same time, 'native policy' became a field of

<sup>16</sup> SecProt (Herbst) to Secretary for Lands, 20.5.1920; NAN:SWAA A 158/1.

<sup>17</sup> For a systematic exposition of settler colonialism, see Biermann/Kössler 1980.

<sup>18</sup> Herbst to PM, n.d.; NAN:ADM 567/2 v2.

contention between the administration and important sections of the white settlers. Initially at least, remaining German settlers were most vociferous in their indictments against what they saw as excessive leniency on the side of the new authorities. It was also this which created a measure of ambivalence, in particular during the initial stages of formulating the new administration's approach to the indigenes. This was especially evident in the case of the Witboois who attempted to make use of such marginal opportunities as presented themselves to reconstruct their communal life and to test the new ground for their own ends. (see Kössler 1998).

## 2.. The reserves: concepts and lands

Under these conditions, the creation of 'native reserves' was clearly a priority matter for the occupying power. Late in 1919, the Union Lands Department asked for 'full particulars of all areas set aside as native reserves by the late German Government and the present Administration' as well as of any areas ... provisionally earmarked as native reserves<sup>19</sup>. The Lands Department in Pretoria criticized the administration's practice of establishing temporary reserves 'in what may be regarded as strictly European Areas'<sup>20</sup>. Secretary Major Herbst defended the existing policy as a means both of keeping the old and infirm out of the urban locations, and ensuring the scarce supply of labour, since 'a large number of them working on private farms find the owner unable to allow grazing for their stock,' which would entail the danger of 'the native clearing out into the Desert or squatting on vacant Crown land in order to maintain his cattle'. Therefore, 'in the interests of the employer and employee alike it is considered to be absolutely necessary to provide these farms for the natives working in the particular districts', and Herbst spelled out a distinct policy clearly related to the pervasive problem of labour supply:

'In order not to disturb the labour supply of the district it has been thought advisable to have a small Reserve of this nature in each district, otherwise where they were unable to find grazing set apart for their stock.'<sup>21</sup>

This seemed all the more important since many labourers were paid in kind or used their wages to buy stock as the usual means to accumulate and safeguard wealth.<sup>22</sup> The widespread and consistent concern about a lack of labour power for the settler farming

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<sup>19</sup> Officer in Charge Lands Department to SecProt, 11.12.19; NAN: SWAA A 158/1, v1.

<sup>20</sup> Dept. of Lands Cape Town to Gorges, 29.3.1920; ib.

<sup>21</sup> All quotes Secretary for the Protectoate (Herbst) to Secretary for Lands, 20.5.1920; NAN: SWAA A 158/1.

<sup>22</sup> see e.g., submission by 'WITBOOI PEOPLE' undated (before 22.9.1922); NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1. This was not limited to the initial phase of South African rule: cf. Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held at Gibeon on Saturday 7.4.1934, for an official exhortation to follow this strategy to overcome the effects of drought, and same dated 5.10.1934 for advice on savings strategy and support of the aged; both ib., v2; cf. Minutes of Combined Board and Tribal Meeting Held at Tses on the 27th February 1940; NAN:SWAA A 50/47/5 v1. generally on the connection between farm labour, stock acquisition and grazing also Silvester 1993, pp.91, 93.



section and also for the mining economy<sup>23</sup> thus were central concerns in the formulation of a 'native', and more specifically, of a reserve policy.

The reserve question was considered as urgent, to be dealt with by a commission which Jan Smuts in his capacity of Prime Minister of the Union considered as 'eminently desirable'.<sup>24</sup> A commission of three was appointed, after some bureaucratic holdups, on 15 July, 1920. Its terms of reference asked them to

'enquire into the question of native Reserves in the Protectorate and make recommendations as to which of the present Reserves should be retained and what further areas should be set aside for that purpose';

they were also to evaluate land claims of the Rehoboth Basters.<sup>25</sup> This Commission appears to have carried out some business during August and September,<sup>26</sup> but for reasons not on record, a new two-member commission, consisting of H. W. Drew, then Inspecting Officer of the Administration, and Lt. Col. J.A.D. Kruger was appointed on 21 December, 1920. Its terms of reference were much more detailed and included the following main points:

- '(1) The general administration of the native locations and reserves in the Protectorate, their size and the conditions prevailing therein;
- (2) the availability of native labour in such locations and reserves, and generally in the Protectorate, for farm and domestic purposes;
- (3) the extent to which such native labour is so utilised and the methods employed in the distribution of that labour;
- (4) the extent to which female native labour is utilised for domestic and light farm work;
- (5) the reasons why available labour, if any, is not fully utilised for the purposes described in paragraph (2) ...'<sup>27</sup>

These terms clearly spelt out the question of reserves as above all, one of labour supply. The date of the appointment of the new , barely four days after South Africa had been invested with the definite mandate by the League of Nations, would suggest that the administration's attitude towards the 'native question' did indeed take on a new colouring (see e.g. Wellington 1967, pp. 275ff), while remaining true to its former main aims: controlling the indigenous population and securing its labour force for the 'European' sector of settler agriculture and mining industry. Thus, in the administration's view, the question of labour supply took paramount importance in the entire field of 'native policy' which was in

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<sup>23</sup>See Reports of Administrator 1916 l.c., pp. 35f; Report of the Administrator for the Year, 1918 (SAB: GG 606: 9/59/143), pp. 14ff; UoSA 1920, p.5.

<sup>24</sup> Smuts to Gorges, 19.4.1920, NAN: SWAA A 158/4.; see also, i.a., telegramme Smuts to Gorges, received Windhoek, 19.5.20, and intervening correspondence, all *ibid*.

<sup>25</sup> Letters of appointment for John Adams, then chairman of the Land Board, as chairman; M.C.Voss, then serving with the Concessions Commission and J.F. Herbst, as members, by SecProt (Herbst), 15.7.1920; cf. *dto.* to similar letters to G. Schneider of the Department of Lands, as secretary; similar earlier letters of 27.5.1920 to Adams and Schneider; all on A 158/4, l.c. These and the following appointments were all to 'departmental commissions' which did not require appointment by proclamation; see Gorges to Smuts, 18.5.1920; Smuts to Gorges, 19.5.1920.

<sup>26</sup> See correspondence on NAN: SWAA A 158/4, especially, Vos to Gorges, 23.5.1920, Schneider to SecProt, 8.11.1920 (re expenses claimed by Vos).

<sup>27</sup> Identical letters of appointment, SecProt (Waters) to Drew, Kruger, 21.12.1920, *ib.*

fact seen as 'synonymous with the labour question'.<sup>28</sup> But for the reasons explained earlier on by Herbst, it was true at the same time that 'the "native question is the land question"', as the administrator stated in his report for 1921.<sup>29</sup> Only by providing some accommodation for 'natives' not currently employed as well as for their stock could the administration hope to ensure the necessary supply of labour power for the white farming sector.

The two-men commission reported in June 1921. This report was based on visits to 'every town and village in this territory' as well as to 'all recognised reserves', except Sesfontein and the Kaokoveld. The commission had visited altogether '25 locations and reserves' and had held '17 meetings of Europeans', leaving out locations coming under the management of municipalities.<sup>30</sup> Subsequently, a new commission of six members was appointed on which sat, besides the former members and the secretary, the Chairman of the Land Board, Lt. Col. de Jager, the Acting Surveyor General, A.G. Landsberg, and Major Manning who had served, i.a. as magistrate in Gibeon and as Native Commissioner. The new enlarged commission was given the task to make recommendations on the basis of the report by Drew and Kruger.<sup>31</sup>

The concerns of 'Europeans' reflected in the report centred around labour supply, blaming the 'natives' summarily for laziness and idleness. In addition there were various concerns connected with the control of existing reserves. This referred, besides the mobilization of 'idlers', above all the control of stock. This, in consonance with the terms of reference, clearly set the agenda for the commission's recommendations on the administration and control of 'natives' and their stock. The retention of existing and the establishment of additional reserves was recommended on account of these overriding considerations.

Starting from the assumption that many of the perceived problems stemmed from the lack of direct 'European control' over the reserves, the commission called for an administrative structure reaching down to each individual reserve. At the top, 'a capable official of hand', considerable experience in native government' was to be 'granted practically a free This central official, subsequently named 'native commissioner' and later, 'chief native commissioner', was to be 'represented in the reserves by superintendents working through the Magistrates of the various districts'. Besides, he was to have the right to inspect also locations and compounds under municipal control. This structure was motivated by the assertion that 'the native wants some chief,' but at the same time, 'has by now recognised the futility of any endeavour to attain the tribal status which he enjoyed in the past': Thus, what became the (chief) native commissioner was to 'be recognised by the natives as their "chief".'<sup>32</sup> The image of a 'tribal' polity was thus invoked, much as it had been conceived one and a half decades earlier by the South African Native Affairs Commission.<sup>33</sup> But the present commission was far from inferring from this an advocacy of anything like indirect rule, as instituted elsewhere in southern Africa and also in the Union; in the case of the Namibian zone of white settlement,, the reference to 'African' characteristics of government

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<sup>28</sup> Report of Administrator 1920, p.13, qu. by Silvester 1993, p. 37.

<sup>29</sup> UoSA 1922, p. 13, and handwritten marginal on carbon copy of original report of the commission, p. 2, NAN:SWAA A 158/4.

<sup>30</sup> Report of the Native Reserve Commission, dated 8.6.1921, carbon copy (partly torn) and 'copy made 28.7.1953' from the damaged copy on NAN:SWAA A 158/4, p. 1f (page numbers refer to the original).

<sup>31</sup> Letters of appointment, dated 27.5.1921, NAN:SWAA A 158/4, l.c.

<sup>32</sup> Report of the Native Reserves Commission, l.c., pp. 12f.

<sup>33</sup> see especially § 212 of the commission's report, qu. by Schmidt 1996, p. 146.



served merely to legitimate a patriarchally conceived administrative structure which was to reach down to the local level in the persons of the superintendents. To this, the commission added the financial recommendation

'that all revenue derived from native sources should be expended upon native requirements as this will serve as a check upon unreasonable demands and at the same time it will be a source of satisfaction to them to know that they are receiving the benefit of their contributions to the revenue of the country'<sup>34</sup>.

This was later to implemented in the form of the reserve trust funds, an important feature in the economic as well as the political set-up of the reserves.

The wide-spread complaints about 'vagrancy' and stock theft attributed to indigenes the commission found by and large justified. It proposed to enforce stricter control of indigenous people by the introduction of written labour contracts. This was an explicit reversion, even in name, to the *dienstbuch* which had been in use under German rule. As will be seen presently, this document was conceived as a fairly comprehensive means of constant surveillance. The commission recommended also a tightening of the pass law and its stiffer application. 'Residential passes' entitling bearers to live in a reserve were to be linked, not only to a stock qualification as before, but to 'the labour requirements of the district' as well and also to the applicant's character as could be gauged from his *dienstbuch*.<sup>35</sup> The control of their stock was seen as 'intimately connected' with the 'control of natives' themselves. Also in order to better follow up alleged stock theft, the commission called for the branding of all stock which they saw falling into two categories, stock owned by workers on farms being kept there, and stock in the reserves. In the former case, a special brand for 'native owned stock' for each district was recommended as well as a record in the owner's *dienstbuch*. The reserves were to be given each their specific brands, the branding irons. The branding and registration of the animals all to be placed under the charge of the respective superintendents. Indigenes were thus to be excluded from any control of the registration of stock and made more or less completely dependent for all matters related to the acquisition and, as will be seen further, also to the sale of live stock, from the superintendent as the local representative of the state bureaucracy in the reserve.

These considerations established important parameters for the territories which the commission recommended should be proclaimed as reserves. In its notes for the commission, the Native Affairs Department had specified already that

'where possible large areas should be provided away from European inhabited parts as this gives better opportunities for healthy family life, future control and automatically complies with Segregation Policy, so much advocated in parts of the Union'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ib., p. 13

<sup>35</sup>Ib., p. 16

<sup>36</sup> Miscellaneous Notes for Native Reserve Commission, Windhoek, 19.4.1921; NAN:SWAA A 158/4; see also the letter to the same effect from the Department of Lands, Cape Town to Administrator Gorges, 29.3.1920; NAN:SWAA A 158/1 v1; note that the aim of segregation later was explicitly denied when responding to questions by the U.N., see i.a. SecSWA (Neser) to D. Sole, c/o Secretary of External Affairs, 26.8.1948, NAN:SWAA A 73/27/1, v2.

In their report, Drew and Kruger claimed that 'this policy is favoured alike by the European and the native', and also stressed that

'we have studiously avoided the creation of "black islands" in the various districts and for this reason have selected large areas in outlying parts of the country'.<sup>37</sup>

The principle of segregation was variously reaffirmed by the commission. The fullest statement of its principles listed:

- (a) The necessity for the removal of native settlements from essentially European areas.
- (b) The desirability of obviating "Black Islands".
- (c) The necessity of preventing renting of land to natives, commonly known as "Kaffir Farming".
- (d) The desirability of providing healthier and more natural living conditions for the native population.
- (e) The ensuring of facilities for better and more efficient control of reserves.'

Of these five headings, the first three all addressed different aspects of segregation. This is to be noted also in the face of later disclaimers for international public consumption. The Commission saw this policy in basic agreement with the generally prevalent opinion in South Africa. But it emphasised, things were more complicated in the Union: Therefore,

'South West Africa still offers the unique opportunity of carrying out a policy of segregation without disturbing vested rights'.<sup>38</sup>

The stance on segregation was reaffirmed later when the basic set-up of the reserves was already in place. Thus, the acting secretary for S.W.A. noted on the occasion of the first major policy review in 1928:

'The Administration has endeavoured to follow the policy of the Union in regard to land segregation which owing to the less advanced state of the Territory it has far greater chance of putting into successful practice than in the Union'.<sup>39</sup>

The commission in 1921 faced a dilemma in the demands of white farmers to which it gave thorough attention. While anxious to alleviate their labour problem, farmers generally objected, at the same time, 'to the establishment of a reserve in their midst'. This amounted, as the commission noted, to the erroneous expectation 'upon the part of the farmer ... to have his cake and eat it'. But again, such sentiments proved as persistent as they were vociferous. In this conjuncture, the commission took the position of an arbiter advocating the over-all interests of the white settler community in the country which might well come into conflict with particularist, local interests. But the commission also took farmers' fears and objections into account and remarked that

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<sup>37</sup> Report of Native Reserves Commission, l.c., p. 19.

<sup>38</sup> Minutes of Meeting of the Native Reserves Commission for South West Africa: Held at Windhoek on the 21st of June 1921; NAN:SWAA A 158/4; see also UoSA 1922, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Acting Secretary to Deputy Administrato, 1.11.1928 (submitting memorandum by the native commissioner on the report of the Native Reserves Commission of 1928); NAN:SWAA A 158/3 v1.

'we have been forced to select areas situated at greater distances than we should otherwise have done'.

It was therefore in a defensive vein that the commission remarked in its report not only that 'the native is a valuable asset of the country' which should prompt the administration 'to make such provision for the future as will contribute to his contentment'. The commission also argued on account of the historical record that

'it does not take the memory of the oldest inhabitant to remind one that the natives owned the whole of this territory, so that the extent required by us is not unreasonable - in fact it is infinitesimal in comparison with the area occupied by Europeans or available for European occupation - especially as the sites selected are ... in sparsely populated parts.'<sup>40</sup>

Obviously, this line of reasoning was not directed towards a redress of the wrongs of the past. Rather, it was meant to justify in the eyes of the administration and especially, in the eyes of the settlers the spatial extent the reserves would eventually reach according to the recommendations of the commission. Thus, we can gauge the resistance encountered by the commission when it came to concrete recommendations for sites, especially on a local level. But the strategy to procure at least the larger part of the labour power needed within the white settler farming economy and for domestic services inside the Police Zone necessitated, as the commission pointed out time and again, also the creation of reserves - at least as long as the labour recruiting strategy was linked to an explicit policy of 'racial' segregation. As has been indicated, the commission considered Namibia as something of an near ideal laboratory or a testing ground precisely for this kind policy.

Segregation was considered by the commission as a prerequisite not only for labour recruitment but for proper control of the 'natives' as well. The commission noted difficulties to control 'most of the reserves' in terms of labour supplies and 'idleness', due to their remoteness from administrative centres. It also came out strongly against the 'unfortunate and unsavoury' fact 'of the cohabitation of European males with native women' which was 'certainly not ... calculated to stimulate respect'.<sup>41</sup> This was clearly in line with the general directive given to the commission to create reserves preferably outside the area of white settlement, thus creating 'a controlled population on the Eastern side of S.W.A.' which also was seen as 'a remedy against the alleged lawlessness of the *Bushmen* there'.<sup>42</sup>

All these considerations may be seen as elements foreshadowing future, much more sweeping policies along the lines of segregation.<sup>43</sup> To these must be added an important point of precision which the commission included into its report. This also foreshadowed some of the salient problems which, during the following decades, the inhabitants in particular of the southern reserves had to face. In its over-all policy statement, the commission stressed that the reserves had been planned 'with a view also to accomodate therein *natives belonging to more than one tribe*'.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, the commission met anticipated criticism that the rather remote areas recommended for reserves might mean

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<sup>40</sup> All foregoing quotes: Report of the Native Reserves Commission, l.c. p. 19.

<sup>41</sup> *Ib.*, p. 10.

<sup>42</sup> Native Affairs, Miscellaneous Notes for Native Affairs Commission, Windhoek, 19.4.1921, *ib.*

<sup>43</sup> On the earlier roots of Apartheid that may be discerned during the German period already, see Melber 1982, pp. 104-118.

<sup>44</sup> Report, l.c., p. 19; emphasis added.



'denuding certain districts of their labour supply' by pointing out that 'this report ... restricts accomodation in the reserves to certain persons only and not to *all* natives'.<sup>45</sup> The latter phrase referred, of course, to the 'idlers' that were to be 'combed out' of the reserves and put to waged labour on the farms. Taken together, this meant a clear assertion of ultimate control for the administration. This gave a pivotal position to the superintendents who were to be placed in charge of each reserve, in terms of the report. As will be seen, they were conceived of as the lowest echelon of a line of administrative command leading, via the magistrates, up to the Native Commissioner, later called Chief Native Commissioner in Windhoek when the local magistrates were styled as native commissioners for their respective districts. During the 1930s and 1940s, this office was held, mainly for lack of funds, concurrently by the secretary for S.W.A. This arrangement may be seen to testify both to the low priority of 'native affairs' in the administrative set-up and to the high degree of centralization of the department's operations.

The enumerated provisions made it clear that, in contradistinction to the Union, the reserves created upon the recommendations of the commission were not 'tribal' reserves in the same sense as this was true of the South African reserves at that time (see also Silvester 1993, pp. 42ff). But the concept of native reserves as proposed by the commission and carried through subsequently, was by no means totally devoid of such tribal connotations. This is certainly true in the case of the Berseba area which exhibits the clearest case of continuity in the southern part of the country. But it also holds true of the newly created Krantzplatz or Gibeon reserve.<sup>46</sup> There were deep ambivalences in this conception which will be detailed in the following. This ambiguous framework set the stage for responses and strategies both by, the administration or its local representatives and by the reserve inhabitants with their 'headmen'. Both sides were moving uneasily, or in a tactical fashion as the case might be, back and forth between claims for 'tribal' identity connected to a particular reserve on the one hand and been mentioned in the commission's report also covered only a fairly limited area, but contrary to the main thrust of the report's proposals it occupied a central position, directly adjacent to the district centre and straddling the railway line as well as the motor road which was administrative fiat over admission and land use on the other. This ambivalence contained important potentials for the further development of reserves in Namibia up to the last phase of colonial occupation with its shift towards social engineering on a much grander scale in terms of the 'homeland' policy with its shift toward a decidedly ethnic and tribal language. The latter point is borne out by some of the recommendations of the commission for the creation of new reserves.

In territorial terms, the commission made recommendations mainly for the Police Zone. Basically, at least one reserve was to be created within each administrative district. The size and quality of these reserves varied widely, ranging from the half-desert farm of Neuhoef in the district of Maltahöhe, never accomodating more than a few tens of people, to the extensive areas that were occupied by Hereros east of the Waterberg. But even in the larger reserves with comparatively high potential there were problems as the administrator admitted in his report to the League of Nations for 1923:

'The nature of the country which still remained [for the creation of reserves] is waterless for the most part, and ... needed careful inspection ... before it would be possible to select suitable tracts ... .' (UoSA 1924, p. 13)

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<sup>45</sup> *Ib.*, pp. 19f.

<sup>46</sup> see Kössler 1998; the spelling of 'Krantzplatz' varies widely; generally the above version has been adopted, but in direct quotations, the original forms have been preserved.

The reserve commission recognized formally existing rights of groups of indigenes, namely the Damara reserve of Okombahe, and the areas owned respectively by the Bersebaners and the Bondelswarts in the South. These were based on formal treaties with or grants by the former colonial power. The commission explicitly did not recognize any claims to land lost during German rule, although it was clear, as the administrator noted, that

'the Natives ... had formed the expectation that this Administration as the natural result of the war would confiscate German owned farms and thus the Natives would recover the lost land ... previously occupied by them" (ib.).

The policy defined in broad terms by the Native Reserve Commission took, without any concession, as its point of departure the territorial *status quo* as it had been defined during the last decade of German colonial rule. This implied above all final sanctioning of the wholesale confiscations of African lands that had taken place after the great rising in 1904-07. Given the stated objectives of South African occupation of the country, this could hardly be otherwise, since this involved a massive inflow of settlers. This did not bar that South African propaganda as well as some concrete steps immediately following military occupation may well have been read as justification for hopes to the contrary.

In the South, the commission recommended the retention of the small Soromas reserve near Bethanië and the creation of a reserve at Neuhof, further the closing of the 'temporary reserves' at Hoachanas, Witbooisvlei and Vaalgras.<sup>47</sup> In 1924, Krantzplatz reserve was added in the vicinity of Gibeon. This reserve which had not rapidly gaining importance.<sup>48</sup> In addition Krantzplatz figured rather prominently on account to its albeit somewhat precarious connection with the Witbooi group.

The ambivalence of the reserve conception and the potential consequences of the policy of segregation came out with particular clarity in the commission's recommendation for the creation of the Tses Reserve in Southern Namibia. Initially, it was to be called the Fish River Reserve and only after the commission noted to its surprise that that landmark river did not even so much as touch the intended reserve did they change the name which was now taken from the intended headquarters. This spot also housed a railway station with a few maintenance workers and from the 1926 onwards, mainly due to its good traffic links, developed from an 'infinitesimal settlement' into an important Catholic church and school centre (Wehrl 1994, pp. 399-403). Tses reserve was to be formed on a large area of land upwards of 200.000 ha which the administration intended to purchase from the Berseba tribe. The Bersebaners had incurred very heavy debts to traders since late German times and were offered to clear themselves of this burden by alienating just under a quarter of their land guaranteed them under the German treaty of protection. The land in question is cut off from the present-day Berseba area by the railway line running in a fairly straight North-South direction and stretches from there eastward to Vaalgras with the village of Tses on its Western rim.

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<sup>47</sup> Up to the mid-1920's Vaalgras, where Hendrik Witbooi had been killed in action in 1905, was mostly known as Witbooisende. On the establishment of these reserves, see OG No 76 (dated 23.6.1921), on NAN:SWAA A 158/1 v1.

<sup>48</sup> cf. the early sentiment also by farmers calling for close police surveillance of a proposed reserve in Gibeon district, which would be achieved by a reserve 'as close to the town as possible'; MilMag Capt JJ de Wit to SecProt 10.4.1919; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1.

The Native Reserve Commission proposed to use the Tses area as a kind of receptacle for all the indigenous groups in the Southern part of the country they apparently could not accommodate elsewhere. Besides the Vaalgras group,<sup>49</sup> their plans for removal to Tses included the Witboois, then settled provisionally at Witbooisvlei (cf. Kössler 1998) and also the Red Nation who were holding on to their ancestral seat of Hoachanas, then in Rehoboth district.<sup>50</sup> Another plan, which was eventually pursued with some vigour by the administration later on, envisaged the Red Nation to be removed to either the Aminuis or Epikuro reserve in the eastern central part of the country and eventually settled mainly by Hereros.<sup>51</sup>

In the view of the commission, Tses recommended itself as 'an area practically segregated from the Europeans' while 'the old police station at Tses would be available as quarters for a superintendent'.<sup>52</sup> Later on, however, they felt a need to add that the proposed closing of the reserve 'Witbooisende' would have to be subject to the results of an inspection carried out by their member Kruger.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, altogether six farms, known as the Daberas bloc and situated in the North-Western corner of the future reserve which had been either included in the original transaction or were yet to be purchased to be purchased from the Bersebaners, were now earmarked for later sale to settlers.<sup>54</sup> A few years later, the native commissioner reported after a visit to the reserve which had been formed in the meantime that this was 'the poorest ground I have ever seen'. He further bemoaned the alienation of the Daberas farms, mostly unoccupied at that time, which he thought was 'the best part of that land', although even there several boreholes had been unsuccessful.<sup>55</sup> He further regretted to have turned down the advice of the superintendent two years earlier to include at least Klein Daberas and strongly advocated to include at least Klein Daberas which was vacant at the time into the reserve.<sup>56</sup>

This episode stands out for two reasons. Firstly, it is a fairly blatant example - but not by any means the only one - of where the administration pursued a 'grand' design in 'native policy' without ascertaining first the most vital and basic prerequisites, i.e. in this case, the suitability and viability of the proposed reserve. In southern Namibia, this concerns above all, the long-term quality of the grazing and the availability of water. This of course, also

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<sup>49</sup> At present known as Stephanus group or Nama speaking Hereros; Vaalgras was eventually retained as their home area and included into Tses reserve; see i.a. correspondence between Jan Apollos and the administrator 1925/1926 on NAN: SWAA A 217/1 v2.

<sup>50</sup> See Report, l.c., pp. 20, 21; Draft Memorandum [by the Administrator] Regarding Native Reserves Commission Report dated 8th June 1921, and subsequent recommendations by enlarged Commission, 19.8.1921, NAN: SWAA A 158/4; Minutes of the Native Reserves Commission for South West Africa, Windhoek 21.6.1921, ib.; Minutes of the Native Reserves Commission, Windhoek 12.9.1921; ib.

<sup>51</sup> see Draft Memorandum, l.c. The struggle for the retention of Hoachanas as the traditional centre of the Red Nation eventually extended until well into the 1970s.

<sup>52</sup> Report, l.c. p. 20.

<sup>53</sup> Minutes, 21.6.1921, l.c.; Minutes, 12.9.1921.

<sup>54</sup> Minutes, 12.9.1921, l.c.; the farms concerned were Dorn Daberas, Groos Daberas and Daberas Ost, while Daberas Pforte, Daberas Sud and Klein Daberas were still to be purchased by the administration.

<sup>55</sup> The yield of one such borehole, on Daberas Süd inside the reserve, had been reported 'as bad as sea water'; Sup Tses (H.N. van der Made) to Mag Kh, 1.8.1924; NAN:SWAA 158/2 v1.

<sup>56</sup> Memo by T. Edwards, NC to Sec on Tses Native Reserve (26.10.1928); NAN:SWAA A 158/3 v1.



flies into the face of the attempts to legitimize the South West Africa Administration's 'native policy' on an international scale and above all towards the League of Nations. The impressive hectares presented for public consumption internationally only feigned a success of this policy. In reality, they were next to meaningless. Secondly, the original plans for the Tses reserve laid down for the first time a feature of that 'native policy' which pointed towards the future: It amounted to a conception of fairly large-scale removals, involving at least two or three tribal groups, in order to implement 'segregation' in the sense of creating large and contiguous reserves well removed from the centres of white settlement and farming agriculture. It may be surmised that failure on the first count contributed somewhat to failure on the second. In the case of the Witboois at least, the barrenness of the Tses area was adduced against moving into the reserve. Tses reserve eventually took on a somewhat different complexion than envisaged. Its inhabitants consisting mainly of Damaras, Hereros and a group of Namas which were referred during the 1920s as belonging to the Veldskoendraers tribe.<sup>57</sup> As has been mentioned, Vaalgras was eventually included into this reserve against the original plans.

In the southern part of the country, Tses may be seen as exemplary for the thrust of the policy laid down by the Native Reserve Commission, as far as it aimed to dissociate the reserves from tribal connotations. This ran counter to central aspects of reserve policy not only in South Africa, but in British colonies in Southern Africa as well. Here, the installation of indirect rule was tantamount to strengthening tribal rulers, or even creating that office where it had not existed before. In many cases, this involved a thorough redefinition of tribal boundaries and identities which was justified by referring to supposedly unshakable 'ethnic' units.<sup>58</sup> The Native Reserve Commission in Namibia as well as the administration claimed on the contrary, that 'unbroken tribes' did not exist at all within the Police Zone (UoSA 1923, p. 12). Thence, they did lay claim to creating a kind of surrogate for what they took as tribal government by installing an authoritarian local administrative structure. Over and above that, they considered it largely unnecessary to pay attention to the collective identities and loyalties of the people that were primarily affected by administrative design and action. The reserves in Namibia south of the Red Line therefore were conceived, in the first place, as administrative units to ensure labour supply and act as a sort of a strictly guarded and reglemented receptacle for those indigenes who were temporarily or permanently out of waged employment. But this is not where the matter ends.

### 3. Reserve Regulations and their contradictions

The creation of reserves in the sense of administratively closely monitored, economically functionalized reservoirs and receptacles of labour power may be regarded as the over-all guideline of the policy formulated by the Native Reserve Commission. However, this was by no means congruous with the actual situation pertaining in the various areas so designated. It rested on a number of false assertions. In particular, the assumption that there were no 'unbroken tribes' in the southern and central parts of the country was central to the policy concept as it afforded the rationale for the kind of planning envisaged in the

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<sup>57</sup> Sup Tses (H.N. van der Made) to Mag Kh, 1.8.1924; NAN:SWAA A 217/1, v2.

<sup>58</sup> For South Africa, see Schmidt 1996, chpt. IV; on two cases from Malawi (Tumbuka, Ngoni), see Vail/White 1989; for North-Western Zambia (Lunda, Luvale), see Papstein 1989 and von Oppen 1996.

proposed kind of reserves. But this assumption, if it could be upheld at all, at least would have to be qualified in a number of ways: Amongst the tribal and ethnic groups who had taken part most prominently in the great rising and therefore also had been subject of the devastating measures of the German colonial power, various forms of what I shall term revindicative politics were clearly apparent, at the latest after the South African occupation.<sup>59</sup> In addition, there remained, as an outcome of a different and rather defensive strategy in dealing with colonial domination, yet clearly 'unbroken' tribal units, with Berseba as an exemplary and singular case in the South. Besides, the Bondelswarts, under an accord with the German government, had also managed to remain on their ancestral ground after the great rising. Even the brutal suppression of their renewed revolt in 1922 did not challenge the onwership rights over the reserve which were vested in the tribe.

For the 'native policy' as defined by the administration during the early 1920s, these processes may be considered as inconsistencies that had to be accomodated in some way. This emerges most clearly in central issues of control over the reserves. These concern, first, the rights of the headmen as well as in certain cases their designation as *Kaptein*, and their position vis-à-vis the various echelons of administration, and further, the imposition of grazing fees on the reserves in terms of the Native Reserves Regulations of 1924.<sup>60</sup>

In these regulations, magistrates, superintendents and medical officers were given sweeping powers to control practically all aspects of life in the reserve. Especially the position of the superintendent appeared overwhelming: He was to allot land, collect fees and grazing fees in particular, issue passes, brand stock and supervise sanitation as well as the felling of trees, and he alone could authorize people to keep dogs. This involved also comprehensive control of movements of people and stock in and out of the reserve, hut registers including occupants and their stock. Reserve inhabitants were required to report any changes in personal affairs, especially births and deaths. There was a strict ban on any alcoholic drink,<sup>61</sup> including 'kaffir beer', and superintendents, headmen and police were given full powers of search without warrant upon a corresponding suspicion. Coffee shops, eating and boarding houses were also strictly reglemented and made subject to permits by the superintendent. He was also given power to authorize any public gathering. The magistrate and the administrator were made responsible for the eviciton of 'undesirable persons' and for the permission to hawk or trade in a reserve.

The headmen put into charge of the reserves or of wards within them were defined in the regulations above all by what they were *not* allowed to do. Four out of 13 items on their duties were outright *prohibitions* for them such as to treat criminal cases themselves (a), to ask for fees without authority by the magistrate (b), to allot land or evict occupants from the land (c), to give permission of residence in the reserve (f). These strategic functions were all vested in the superintendent; for the rest, headmen were to report on all kinds of matters, ranging from vacant allotments to stock disease and stray stock to venereal disease and the appearance of strangers on a reserve. Needless to say that the regulations also ordered them summarily to 'obey all instructions given [them] by the Magistrate or Superintendent'.

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<sup>59</sup> See Kössler 1998 for the Witbooi group; on the Hereros, see e.g. Werner 1990.

<sup>60</sup> Government Notice 68/1924, OG 16.6.1924.

<sup>61</sup> Combatting alcohol consumption among 'natives' had been made incumbent on the mandatory power in terms of the mandate.



One of the most important provisions of the Native Reserve Regulations were the grazing fees imposed by them, along with the limitations on stock: Individuals were not to own more than 100 head of large and 300 head of small stock and pay, according to numbers owned between 2d and 3d (upwards from 26) a month for every head of large and from ¼d to ½ (upwards from 101) p.m. for small stock, according to the size of the flock or herd. This represented 'a marked increase' from the previous rates fixed in the beginning of 1911 uniformly at 2d per head of large and 2d *per ten* for small stock (Silvester 1993, p. 50). These fees were seen by the administration, besides as a means of controlling stock numbers, also as one main lever to mobilize the young and middle aged, mainly male inhabitants of the reserves as migrant labourers. This concern had been at the centre of 'native' policy from the beginning of South African rule (see also Werner 1993, p. 136). The meaning of the reserves for those living in them and willy-nilly making them their homes is however, quite a different question.<sup>62</sup>

In this respect, the control of the reserves and their resources and the fashion in which day-to-day affairs were regulated were of great importance. This was also affected greatly by the institutional and financial provisions incorporated in the legislation of the 1920s. The most important instrument of raising revenue from the reserves were grazing fees, and in contradistinction to the second largest source of reserve income, the dog tax, this was specific to the reserves. Grazing fees were only collected from inhabitants of reserves according to their stock, while dog or wheel tax was also levied on the population at large.

As had been envisaged by the Native Reserve Commission of 1921, grazing fees became the main source of income for the Reserve Trust Funds which had been established by proclamation,<sup>63</sup> shortly before the regulations themselves were promulgated. The trust funds had a triple purpose and effect. First, as stated in the proclamation, they constitute a fairly narrow financial base, mainly for 'improvements' in the reserves. Such measures included in particular the procurement of breeding animals; the erection of roads, fences, dams and other irrigation works, well-sinking, the procurement of water-pumping equipment, the preparation of garden land. Further stated aims included combatting stock diseases, advancement of mainly agricultural knowledge, and the erection of hospitals. In the southern reserves forming the subject of this investigation, the emphasis lay clearly on the improvements.

All activities and expenditures of the funds were made strictly subject to control by the central administration in Windhoek. Here, the accounts of the trust funds were kept, and for any expenditures, the approval of the administrator was prerequisite. Thus, the office of the Chief Native Commissioner admonished a magistrate after nearly a quarter century of experience with the trust funds,

'that the only expenditure which can be debited against the Reserve Trust Funds is the one which has been approved by His Honour the Administrator ... Applications for expenditures come from you and you are advised of the approval ...'<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> In this sense, the criticism directed against Namibian 'resistance historiography' recently for making this emphasis (Pankhurst 1996), must be qualified, although I would agree that this must not be seen as the sole point of reference when studying the reserves. For further documentation on the administration's attitude, see below.

<sup>63</sup> Native Reserves Trust Funds Administration Proclamation 9/1924, OG 131, 1.4.1924.

<sup>64</sup> CNC (Eedes) to Mag Gobabis, 21.8.1948; NAN:SWAA A 158/2 v1.

This underscores also that the inhabitants of the reserves, the members of the reserve boards and even the headmen were effectively kept out of the administrative decision making process, being mere recipients of central decisions conveyed to them by the magistrate and dependent on which of their requests he deemed necessary or opportune to pass up to Windhoek. Dealings between different trust funds were also regulated within the central administration, e.g., the division of the proceeds when used equipment in the property of three reserve trust funds was about to be sold.<sup>65</sup> By the imposition of grazing fees and their subsequent adjustments, which was consistently done by administrative proclamation, the administration created for itself a potentially powerful instrument of controlling economic developments in the reserves, of course above all, stock numbers. This was of course subject to *effective* control by superintendents, which was, however, not uniformly realized in the reserves.

The measure of imposing some ceiling on stock kept on a particular area of land was closely connected with the overriding concern about mobilising labour power. By building up sufficient large herds, people would be put into a position to evade the necessity of taking up waged labour. They would command an independent means of livelihood and also meet the statutory requirements for being recognized as a reserve resident and therefore exempted from compulsory wage labour. For this reason alone, stock limitation, especially when applied to individual herds, was necessarily an important instrument in the hands of the administration to ensure sufficient labour for settler agriculture. But at the same time, stock ceilings corresponded, at the same time, to definite ecological requirements prevalent on Namibia. In this country of extremely uncertain and generally scanty rainfall, the overgrazing of land and the concomitant long-term destruction of pasture constitute a very real problem. The two-pronged problem of stock limitation and conservation, as it emerged during the ensuing decades, was therefore attributable not only and not necessarily in the first instance to the quest to relement indigenous stock-keeping, but rather, to heeding the inevitable consequences of an arid and even half-desert environment. Where the policy decisions of the administration come into this causal framework is the allotment of areas as reserves that were often marginal in quality and in many cases, especially where the new reserves in the South are concerned, pitifully small to begin with (see also Adams/Werner 1990, pp. 26-35). Therefore, the onus should not be put on the policy of stock limitation as such, and ecological considerations at the very least would have to be weighed against 'the reluctance of officials to countenance pastoralism as an economic option for the local black population in the reserves' (Silvester 1993, p. 47). Rather, it was the pre-set parameters under which the reserves operated and which inevitably generated degradation of living conditions as well as of natural resources and eventually, protest and conflict.

A third and very important effect of the establishment of reserve trusts was the provision for reserve boards contained in the proclamation. They were to be presided over by the district magistrate or superintendent, and consist of the headman and up to six members. Active as well as passive suffrage qualifications included 'adult native males domiciled or possessing substantial interest in such reserve'; this encompassed people owning stock but not actually living in the reserve besides residents. Election was provided for by a 'representative meeting', but appointment was by the administrator, without any limitation of tenure. In addition, the proclamation called for annual general meetings as well. These

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<sup>65</sup> Dir of Works (O. Wiplinger) to CNC, 24.6.1942; CNC to AssNC Wh, 25.9.1942; AssNC Wh to CNC, 24.10.1942; CNC to Mag Mt, 10.11.1942; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v1.

meetings were, i.a., given power to levy a poll tax. While instituting a measure of representative consultation, these provisions, at the same time, re-enforced the over-centralist thrust of South African administration, vesting in the administrator the power of appointment and in the magistrate, viz., superintendent, powers of convening the respective bodies.

Thus, by widening the personal basis on which the headmen could operate, the reserve boards might add administrative efficiency and they might be thought to resemble forms of former tribal government such as the council known to have been in existence among various Nama and Orlam groups (cf. Budack 1972, pp. 172ff, 265ff). But it is clear at first sight that these older bodies were linked to the kinship system and worked in connection with a functionally quite differentiated tribal government, all of which can hardly be said of the reserve boards.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the reserve boards were far from representing any structure upon which something like 'traditional' leadership might rest. Headmen as well as reserve boards were precisely *not* 'traditional leaders' (Adam/Werner 1990, p. 31), but in the first instance, they were made subaltern officials of the administration. Nor can it be said, strictly speaking, that by the implementation of the administration's native policy, 'institutions of the pre-colonial ruling class were derogated into low-echelon functionaries of the colonial administration' (Gottschalk 1978, p. 79). Rather, the administration created a local apparatus in the reserves as well as in the locations which was situated clearly below the lowest echelons of white officialdom, subject to the orders of the superintendent and allowed to report solely through him. This apparatus was recruited, at least in the reserve under particular study, from among the descendants of tribal leaders. The 'headmen' appointed, in particular in Krantzplatz Reserve, certainly did lay claim to being Witbooi *Kapteins* at the same time, but the administration took care to skirt any form of official recognition of this claim (cf. Kössler 1998). In respect to Berseba, which had managed to evade most of the infringements of German and to some extent also of early South African rule, the administration followed a sustained policy to enforce its control. In this strategy the administration could avail itself of internal conflict and was successful when the last *Kaptein* was disposed in 1938 and replaced by two 'headmen' (cf. Silvester 1993, pp. 201-207; Kössler forthc.)

The reserve board and the annual general meetings stipulated in the proclamation did provide an outlet for grievances and were used that way during the following decades. It might be surmised therefore that the new administrative structures represented something similar to neo-tribal institutions in other parts of Africa. But viewed within the whole set-up of the reserve structure, this arrangement resembled indirect rule, as promoted in other British colonies in Africa and also in the Union of South Africa at the time, in outward appearance only. Above all, headmen in the Police Zone under the legislation enacted by the South West Africa Administration during the 1920s, lacked the decisive powers of controlling land and acting as judges, even on minor cases. This position came out graphically in the refusal of the administration to recognize the title of *Kaptein* where this was applicable on account of the tribal office and in its insistence upon using the resented term of 'headman', the term applicable to the capacity of a lowly official in the Department of Native Affairs.

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<sup>66</sup>This becomes also clear in comparison to the abortive attempt to re-institute the tribal government of the Witboois after the return of Izak Witbooi to Gibeon in 1915, cf. Silvester 1993, pp. 159f; NAN:SWAA A 396/8.



This crucial difference between the lowest echelon of reserve administration and traditional leadership was not bridged by the fact that both were united frequently within one person. This difference was most obvious in cases where reserves did not resort to any particular traditional community, because they were settled by people belonging to several tribes or ethnic groups. Where there was some measure of congruence between tribal allegiances and the reserve set-up, the senior traditional leader indeed was likely to be appointed headman. But from this, an uneasy dualist structure resulted as can be seen most graphically in the developments on Krantzplatz reserve. For a brief period, significantly at a time when ethnic distinctions were being increasingly stressed by the administration, Krantzplatz actually had two headmen; besides David Witbooi, a Damara school teacher, Markus Korasip, was appointed specifically to represent the Damaras living in the reserve. Again, Korasip who resigned after a few years, had no apparent traditional claim to leadership but suggested himself rather as a literate and articulate person.<sup>67</sup> This episode underscores the malleability of the headman institution in the hands of the administration and also the uncertain relationship between the reserves and the collective identities of their residents. The former is of course borne out by the struggle around the captaincy in Berseba as well.

All these major or minor, more day-to-day struggles and squabbles revolved around the decisive issue of control over people and over land which was intimately bound up both with the objectives of the administration's 'native' policy on the one hand and with the aspirations of indigenous people for a worthwhile and dignified life on the other. In this, the role and position of the exponents of these aspirations, which may in many cases be seen as traditional leaders in a strict sense, were of particular importance, and it was for this reason that the administration's drive toward styling reserve 'headmen' effectively as subaltern officials was so important. For the same reasons, the institution of reserve headmen cannot be construed simply as one 'co-opting indigenous leaders' (Werner 1993, p. 136), since this misses precisely the tension between subaltern government service and authentic leadership which was experienced, in various ways, by a number of communities and their leaders.

This drive was given particularly clear expression in the last major piece of legislation which set the parameters of 'native affairs' as far as the South West Africa Administration was concerned, the Native Administration Proclamation of 1928.<sup>68</sup> This proclamation, while dealing with a wide array of matters ranging from tribal government to marriage and inheritance, contained important clauses concerning the position of 'headmen' and 'chiefs' and especially, the powers of the administrator in their regard.

In the proclamation, which obviously covered not only the reserves inside the Police Zone but the Northern tribal territories as well, the administrator was invested with the sole right to

'recognise or appoint any person as a chief or headman in charge of a tribe, or of a location or a native reserve',

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<sup>67</sup> see esp. petition by Damara residents, 14.2.1949 and ensuing correspondence, NAN:SWAA 158/6 v3; the whole affair was also in connection with the church split of 1946, since there was ambiguity between Korasip representing 'Damaras' or 'Rhenish Mission people'.

<sup>68</sup> 15/1928, OG 284, 16.7.1928, following references in brackets are to this proclamation.

subject to withdrawal 'at any time' (l.1.a). Leaders thus appointed could also be removed for 'any political offence or for incompetency or for other just cause', and such leaders could be transported to any other part of the territory (l.1.b). The administrator was given the right to define and alter boundaries 'of the area of any tribe or of a location' (l.1.c) and to order

'the removal of any tribe or portion thereof and of any Native from any place to any other place of the mandated Territory' (l.1.d).

Finally, the administrator assumed

'generally ... all political power and authority which according to the laws, customs and usages of Natives, are held and enjoyed by any supreme or paramount native chief' (l.1.g).

This echoed both the sentiments of the South West African Native Reserves Commission of 1921 in favour of conserving the patriarchally conceived political traditions of the 'natives' while transferring them to the colonial administrative structure and the similar solution recommended earlier by the South African Native Reserves Commission of 1903-1905, to transfer chiefly power to the Crown (cf. Schmidt 1996, p. 147). In a later reading, the administrator's position according to this legislation was construed as

'the Administrator who by delegation was the representative of the Governor-General and was clothed with the powers and functions of the Supreme or Paramount Chief'

while the 'power of alienation or disposal' of land, i.e. penultimate decision making over the reserves, rested with the Union Parliament.<sup>69</sup>

This legal and institutional framework remained in place basically up to 1955, when responsibility for 'native affairs' was transferred to the central South African Department of Bantu Affairs. The provisions developed during roughly the first decade of South African rule were centred clearly around the main objectives of securing an adequate labour force for commercial settler agriculture, and of controlling the 'native' population. It is now indicative that apparently, in the eyes of the settlers and in particular of settler farmers, the administration failed rather abysmally on both counts.

#### 4. The issue of idleness

As has been indicated before, there was resistance by settler farmers against reserves being established in their vicinity. The administration further found itself under continuous pressure by farmers claiming

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<sup>69</sup> Notes on Points Raised in Minute 1/18/59 of the 8th July, 1955, from the Secretary for External Affairs Concerning the Draft Observations of the Committee on S.W.A. Regarding Conditions in the Territory of S.W.A.; NAN: SWAA A 73/27/1 Annexure B.

'large numbers of young and able-bodied natives living in the various native reserves in a state of idleness.'

In September 1924, the Native Commissioner therefore requested all magistrates to report on the matter.<sup>70</sup> The returns showed generally very low incidences indeed of 'idling' or 'loafers'. For Gibeon reserve, only one youth was reported as 'unemployed', in the Bondels reserve, five persons were 'warned to go to work' while 28 people not in waged employment owned stock or tended their mothers' animals etc.<sup>71</sup> Still, the Native Commissioner maintained the need to increase labour recruitment while noting a definite difficulty:

"... there is no law at present in force which provides for the granting of exemption certificates in respect of labour as natives are not obliged to seek employment. We must use moral suasion and rely on the economic conditions to prevent able-bodied men "loafing" in the Reserves and at the same time restrict the issue of resident passes.

The League of Nations will not countenance any law which savours of forced labour.<sup>72</sup>

Consequently, grazing fees levied on stock kept on the reserves were considered by the administration as a main instrument in the mobilization of labour. Any political measures were evaluated first from this overriding concern. Thus, in May 1927, Native Commissioner Edwards warned the Secretary for S.W.A., the chief executive officer, that increased fees would be viewed as 'frankly repressive' and confessed his misgivings: that this

'will achieve the object in view, which is to increase the number of labourers available for farm work, I very much doubt. My own observations have convinced me that the only natives who remain in the reserves are those whose presence is necessary for the herding of stock.'

This meant that labour reservoirs in the reserves were actually depleted. But Edwards saw additional limitations to the idea of alleviating the much-bemoaned labour shortages on white farms merely through increased grazing fees. Even if a mobilization of additional labourers were effected by such a move, this would not necessarily relieve the white farming sector. There was, as Edwards pointed out, the additional restraint of gross sectoral wage differentials:

'Should the increased tariff of fees serve to make the natives more industrious it will also drive them to work where the highest wages are paid, and it will be the industrial and mining concerns which will benefit, not the farmer.'

Farm wages in Namibia in the late 1920s, as in all other settler economies in Southern Africa for decades to come, were so pitifully low that they could not possibly attract workers except in extreme need for cash. Edwards added further that the envisaged increase in grazing fees of nearly 50%

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<sup>70</sup> NC to Mags, 15.9.1924; NAN: SWAA 158/2 v1.

<sup>71</sup> Returns, from Gobabis, Karibib, Bethanië (9.10.1924); Mag Warmbad to Native Commissioner, 2.10.1924; Mag Gib to NC, 25.10.24; NAN:SWAA A 158/2 v1.

<sup>72</sup> NC to Mag Okahandja, 24.10.1924; NAN:SWAA A 158/2 v1.

'cannot be applied to the reserves in Gibeon, Keetmanshoop and Bethanie districts. I am satisfied that the grazing in these districts is so poor that the present rates are sufficiently high.'<sup>73</sup>

Labour recruitment and grazing fees were also the main concerns of the Native Reserves Commission which reported in 1928.<sup>74</sup> This commission recommended, in the interest of 'supplying native labour to farmerq ald other bodies,' besides 'stricter control ... over the natives themselves' by police and native constables, more effective control over reserve stock by enforcing branding laws and dipping and by fencing the reserves, for which half the costs would fall on the shoulders of the reserve inhabitants. This was to be complemented by a steep rise in grazing fees for people below 55 years of age, bringing the sum due for 150 head of small stock to 10s5d p.a., whereas before, 6s3d had been charged for 200 head which the commission was confident 'they can easily pay' 'even in more difficult years' (South West Africa 1928, pp. ii-iii). With particular reference to Tses reserve, the commission stated that 'two thirds of the natives can go out working' and this number might be increased 'if the water facilities were improved ... by means of windmills with reservoirs of galvanised iron or cement' (ib., p. iv). A certain measure as well as a certain kind of 'development' were thus considered as a means to reach the functional objective: to set free more adult men for migrant labour which in the eyes of the settler farmers and also in the predominant view of the administration was the main purpose of the reserves. Not to be mistaken for benevolence, this commission also recommended the (re-)introduction of a 'number-disc' to be carried by reserve residents (ib., pp. ii, iii), clearly reminiscent of the ill-famed metal tokens of German times. If the commission recognized the reserves as 'a home for the native where he can spend his old age in peace and rest' (ib., p. ii), therefore, this has to be read within its clearly functional approach centred around procuring cheap farm labour.

Not all of the far-reaching suggestions the Native Reserves Commission of 1928 made to ensure more efficient control and to increase even more the mobilization of black labour power were eventually put into practice (cf. Silvester 1993, p. 47). Further, there was some debate within the administration as to the purpose of the reserves. While the thrust of the commission report was pursued by sections of published opinion, complaining of the deficiency of farm labour as a major obstacle for a further influx of settlers from the Union,<sup>75</sup> the administration did not fully follow the suggestions for such a course. One of the polar positions within officialdom may be represented by the magistrate of Omaruru who argued that

'... in this country stock is the native's means of livelihood and one cannot force him to dispose of this just to pay fees. ... the Reserves were originally set aside as a home for the natives where they could develop along their own lines and it would be manifestly unjust to impose taxes which would make it impossible for them to live there.'

This magistrate also pointed out the cost of controlling the reserves with a special police force.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>73</sup> NC (T. Edwards) to SecSWA, 11.5.1927; NAN:SWAA A 158/3 v1.

<sup>74</sup> South West Africa 1928; the commission visited only Tses, Ovitoto, Otjimbingwe, Otjohorong, Waterberg and Otjituo reserves, all except Tses in the Northern part of the Police Zone.

<sup>75</sup> cf. *Die Suidwes Afrikaner*, 26.10.28, on NAN:SWAA A 158/3 v1.

<sup>76</sup> Mag Omaruru to NC, 10.5.1927; ib.



'Development along their own lines' became a sort of watchword for the policy pursued in the reserves during the following years. Clearly, this was linked inseparably to the over-all programme segregation. Of course, this applies equally to the language of 'home'. These metaphors suggested a measure of traditional grounding of the reserves that carried some truth only in a few cases at best and was clearly at variance with the basic policies laid down by the native Reserve Commission in 1921 and following legislation. Still, both strands were not completely incompatible, since reserves did respond, under the circumstances, *both* their intended functions to serve as receptacles for the old and infirm and also as places to live for women with children *and* in an extremely restrictive way also to aspirations among black Namibians. From both counts, they were bound to engender something like 'home' in the biography of any typical resident even when men would migrate for work on a more or less regular basis for much of their lives, and quite a few women would do the same. Besides this, reserves were, from the inception of South African reserve policy, conceived also as receptacles for 'surplus native stock'.<sup>77</sup> Under this aspect, with diminishing chances to find grazing on commercial farms and under pressure from a constant influx of settlers, reserves did serve a very important purpose within individual strategies of survival and also of accumulation of stock. Reserves were and became more than just areas to stay along this pragmatic logic as well by the fact that in the South at least, they were situated on land that did have some measure of traditional value for communities living there. This is also born out by stubborn fights over land and over the right to stay that mark much of the history of traditional communities in Namibia and of course, in other parts of Southern Africa as well.

What matters here is that initiatives for 'development' taken by the lower echelons - magistrates and superintendents - of the administration corresponded to a number of over-all objectives and rationales. These were not uniform and not without their contradictions. From the considerations on the labour question, which formed the central rationale of the administration at least until the recruitment of Ovambo migrant labour also for the Spouthern farming economy became more widespread in the 1940s, it has emerged that anything would be considered useful and welcome that would objectively 'free' labour power from tasks in the reserves. This became graphically clear when the erection of windmills and of proper stock watering installations around them was advocated since this would save a lot of work - which being quite strenuous mostly had to be performed by young men - and thus generate a number of persons eligible to work on white farms. 'Development work' and 'improvements' in the provision of water, even if they had involved some cost to the administration can therefore be viewed, in part at the very least, as components of an effort by the administration to solve the obstinate labour problem. Similarly, a second category of 'improvement', also recommended by the Native Reserves Commission of 1928, was at least as highly functional for the white farming community as it was for reserve residents: fencing. Here the commission had been quite clear about the financial side. The reserves were to carry one half of the considerable costs of fencing in their boundaries in order to prevent stock from straying on either side and thus, to avoid inevitable disputes over animals grazing in the wrong place, being impounded etc. In an environment where white farmers both formed an effective pressure group and constantly were highly apprehensive about the neighbourhood of reserves, it is therefore obvious that this kind of initiative would be a favourite for superintendents; and certainly, it was not

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<sup>77</sup> Native Affairs Report, 1921 (handwritten draft); NAN:SWAA A 158/1 v1; cf also NC to Mags, 15.9.1924; ib., v2. The temporary reserve of Witbooisvlei was actually referred to as 'a reserve ... for native stock'; MilMag Gibeon (de Witt) to ProtSec 15.10.1919; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1.



entirely against the interests of stock owners in the reserves. Besides some attempts at gardening and stock improvement, road building, it was the recurrent question of procuring water and fencing which formed the main themes of 'development' for the coming two or three decades, as far as reserves were concerned.

The Reserves Commission of 1928 had touched on the sensitive point of finance when recommending that half of the cost of fencing should be shouldered by reserve trust funds. The administration's policy here was very consistently built on the proposition that the reserves should pay their own way and not burden the 'white taxpayer'. On this count, the mandatory power encountered considerable criticism on the international scene, in the debates of the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission. A further aspect of finance in 'development' work, but also of the broader issues of control and labour supply associated with it, was the remuneration of labourers engaged in development activities. These will be dealt with in turn.

## 5. Reserve finance

Besides being an effective means of control as shown above, the reserve trust funds were the main source of finance earmarked for 'development' of the reserve. Their income derived predominantly from grazing fees, besides which there was some dog tax, licence fees for collecting fire wood etc. Every initiative had to be approved by Windhoek were the accounts were also kept. It must be considered indicative for the concrete way the administration dealt with matters concerning 'natives' and the reserves allotted to them that only after ten years the problem was raised that most of these accounts had accumulated considerable positive balances, but no interest had been paid for this by the administration, nor was interest accrued accounted for! As late as October 1934, the administration accountant voiced serious misgivings that

'[t]he balances [of the reserve trust funds] are in the Administration Account and we utilise them to meet our drawings on that account - that is we are borrowing them to meet a deficit in the Territory Revenue Fund ... or else we are using them to cover our suspense accounts, which is also illegal.'

At the time, the sum in question amounted to more than £ 17,000.<sup>78</sup>

Further, it was in particular the smaller reserves which accumulated large positive balances in their trust funds. This fact can be read as an indicator that not much was actually done there in the way of 'improvements'. Insofar, for a decade, grazing fees and taxes accruing to reserve trust funds had been tantamount to a direct and interest-free forced loan reserve residents and stock owners had been made to pay into the administration's coffers for ten years. Thus, the credit of the Krantzplatz Trust Fund, during the crisis-ridden years of 1931-34, stood continually at well over £ 600, at times at more than £ 700; Tses oscillated around £ 1900, and the small reserve of Hoachanas amassed a credit rising steadily from

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<sup>78</sup> Accountant to Secretary, 8.10.1934; *ib.*; in a handwritten note signed M. de Villiers, the accountant was advised on 2.4.1935 (!) to give interest, *viz.* debit interest on overdrafts, and else to obtain ministerial authority for the current practice, which amounted to dealing short shrift with his representations; see *ib.*; on balances, see monthly returns, *ib.*

just over £ 313 in August 1931 to more than £ 418 at the time of the auditor's intervention.<sup>79</sup> These sums may appear rather small in absolute terms. But they certainly constituted a serious drain on people's resources, especially since they had to be paid in cash. These credits were also considerable when related to the incoming amounts.<sup>80</sup> They were also substantial in comparison with the £ 15-17,000 allocated annually to Native Affairs during the 1920s and in relation to the administration's overall annual expenditure of £ 6-700,000 during the same period.<sup>81</sup>

Despite some noticeable vacillations, there is a clear over-all tendency for these southern reserves to run up and maintain considerable credits in their reserve funds also throughout the 1930s. This testifies above all to the relatively small extent of actual 'development' or 'improvement' initiatives for which this money was supposedly collected according to legal provisions. In turn, the rationale behind the reserves policy to treat these above all as reservoirs for labour power, is thus underscored. This notwithstanding, administrative policy was motivated on occasion by broadening the financial basis of a reserve. This was one reason given by the magistrate for admitting additional, 'coloured' residents against the will of the reserve board. According to this reasoning,

'it was one of the purposes of the [reserve] law that Reserves should be developed to their fullest extent ... and the only means of raising funds is by increasing the herds.'<sup>82</sup>

In this instance at least, the constant concern articulated by officials about a possible overstocking of the reserves was dropped in favour of financial considerations. This was also in keeping with the general proposition given increasing weight by the administration, that the reserves should pay their own way, mainly on the basis of grazing fees. The same magistrate, F.W.Ninow, adamantly refused any idea of paying grazing fees in kind, while workers on farms received their wages in the form of animals during the depression.<sup>83</sup> Also in connection with the proposed moving in of the Coloured families, the magistrate stressed the non-tribal purpose of the reserve:

'The Gibeon Reserve is not intended for the use of the Witboois alone. It is open to Natives of all tribes ... . In terms of the law, these Coloured people are treated the same as Natives as one of their ancestors is an aborigine ...'<sup>84</sup>

Ninow, who showed some initiative in development activities on Krantzplatz reserve, did endorse the request for a reduction of grazing fees when people were suffering under the combined effects of economic depression and drought. He did so in a fashion which

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<sup>79</sup> See, also for the following remarks, monthly returns, *ib.*, running with interruptions from August 1931 to July 1942.

<sup>80</sup> Available data for Krantzplatz show that in 1930, monthly collections were well under £ 7 in 1930, averaged well below £ 9 in 1931 and just over £ 6 in 1934, with a dramatic increase of arrears, mainly as a result of the economic crisis. Yearly income of the trust fund amounted to £ 77, £ 96, £ 56 respectively, ; see NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1-2.

<sup>81</sup> cf. Replies to Questionnaire of the L of N Permanent Mandates Commission No A 14 1926 VI in Respect of the Mandated Territory of SWA; NAN:SWAA A 394/3 Annexure.

<sup>82</sup> Minutes of Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held in the School Room at Krantzplatz at 4.30 p.m. on 1.4.1931; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v2.

<sup>83</sup> Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board & Residents held at Krantzplatz at 11 a.m. on 10.10.1931; *ib.*

<sup>84</sup> Minutes of Krantzplatz reserve board meeting, 1.4.1931, *l.c.*

revealed not only administrative ways of dealing with 'natives' but also further inherent contradictions of the endeavour to keep separate accounts for them and for 'Europeans':

'The merits of their claim were not discussed with them for reasons of discipline, but my personal views are that the tariff is excessive especially for the numbers in excess of 25 Large Stock and 100 small stock. Moreover, the tariff for European stock grazing on Crown Land was reduced to 7½d. per 100 p.m. during the drought compared with the Native Reserve tariff of 2/1 and 4/2 per 100 p.m.

'The proceeds of the reserve fees are devoted to their Trust Fund but on the other hand considerable amounts were expended in order to open up reserve grazing ground for Europeans.'<sup>85</sup>

When during the mid-1940s, urgent repairs at the larger of the two dams in the Krantzplatz reserve, known as the 'Herero Dam', prompted the question of a 'loan' to be advanced by the central administration to the reserve fund, the problem of reserve finance and its relation to the over-all financial set-up of the territory were dealt with from another angle. An advance of some £ 950 was considered as necessary for the repairs. The administration's accounting department responded to this problem which apparently exploded normal routine. by noting that 'a Native Trust Fund is not a Local Authority in terms of the Local Loans Ordinance 1927.' This raised further questions on accounting mechanism and financial reliability:

1. How can we advance the money?
2. If we do advance the money is there any prospect of repayment?<sup>86</sup>

The administration found that no provision had been made so far in its yearly estimates for such a case and resolved to do so in the future.<sup>87</sup> In the present case, the trust fund was given a loan from the Capital Advances Account and repayment provided for at a rate of £ 100 p.a. This was approved by the administrator.<sup>88</sup> It was at this stage only that the inhabitants of the reserve came in, after the original report of seepage in the dam. Those who sustained the trust fund and would have to pay for the loan were only given the chance to assent to a pre-ordained arrangement. The 'Magistrate and Native Commissioner' at Mariental was now advised that

'... His Honour the Administrator has agreed,, subject to the undermentioned conditions, to the sum of £ 950 being loaned to the Fund from the [Ad]ministration's Capital Advance Account:-

1. The reserve residents are consulted and it [is] their express wish that the work be [??] as a charge against their Reserve F[und.]
2. The natives accept the proposal se [??] and agree to repay the loans by mean[s of an] Annual Levy of 10/- upon every adul[t male?] domiciled in the reserve or upon the [owner] of any stock habitually kept therein if the owner be not resident in the reserve ...

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<sup>85</sup> Mag Mt (Ninow) to SecSWA, 8.3.1934; ib.; the request was subsequently granted by the administration, see SecSWA (Courtney Clarke) to Adm (Conradie), 11.4.1934; approved 12.4.1934; Government Notice 49/1934, 23.4.1934; all ib.

<sup>86</sup> Handwritten Minute: Accountant, 3.10.1946; cf. Dir of Works to CNC, 11.9.1946; AddCNC (R. L. Eaton) to SecSWA, 3.10.1946; all on NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v1.

<sup>87</sup> see handwritten notes dated 3.10.1946, 20.10.1946, 22.10.1946; ib.

<sup>88</sup> SecSWA to Adm 29.10.1946, appr. 30.10.1946; ib.



It should be explained to the natives that the annual income of their Reserve Fund is between [£ 100 and ] £ 200 and that any of this money which is not required for expenditure that is normally charged to the Fund, wil[!] also be used to reduce the loan.<sup>89</sup>

The two conditions apparently had been supplemented after the administrator had given his approval for the over-all operation. In this way, the administration meant obviously to avoid an overdraft on the trust fund which it considered to be excessive. The residents' meeting at Krantzplatz unanimously rejected this proposal, pointing out mainly that they had no money and after having lost stock during the drought, they saw 'no possibility for such a big loan'. They added their preference for a borehole as against a dam should such a big investment be made at all.<sup>90</sup> The central administration, while noting that this decision was 'unfortunate',<sup>91</sup> proceeded with its plans according to its own definition of priorities. The Director of Works was asked 'to have the work carried out as soon as possible' and the magistrate at Mariental to

'tell them that as they are not prepared totax themselves to pay for this work, they cannot expect any further improvements to their reserve during the period the Trust Fund is paying off the loan.'<sup>92</sup>

Roughly three years later, the debt was eventually cancelled as the reserve's finances made it unlikely that the yearly payments could be met. The actual cost of £ 814-1-10 was paid out of the central Native Areas Account.<sup>93</sup> This episode may demonstrate, beside the inherent centralism of 'native' administration and the strictly top-down decision making structure, the difficulties involved in the proposition of making the reserves pay for their own needs in the sense that they were constituted as separate financial entities, but without the rights and potentials of local authorities as mentioned specifically in this case. The eventual cancellation of the debt underscores the fictitious nature of such involuntary self-reliance. This also points to the broader question of decision making concerning the actual use of the reserve trust funds.

## 6. SELF-DEFENCE AND SELF-INTERPRETATION: SOUTH AFRICAN RESERVE POLICY BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

In Namibia, the reserve system and in particular, reserve development and finance had, under the particular circumstances of the Mandate, a specific legimatory dimension. The mandate in connection with the Covenant of the League of Nations stipulated specifically the mandatory power's obligation to further the well-being and conditions of the inhabitants and the dealings of the administration in this respect underwent some scrutiny from a rather early time in the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations. This created the occasion for some revealing policy statements by the representatives of South Africa as

<sup>89</sup> CNC (W.J.M.Slater) to Mag/NC Mt, [8.11.46] (right margin torn, see rectangular brackets); ib.

<sup>90</sup> Notule van Vergadering van Inwoners van Krantzplaats Naturelle Reserwe, distrik Gibeon. Gehou te Krantzplaats om 4uur n.m. Dinsdag, 19 November, 1946, belê in terme van Hoof Naturelle Kommissarsis se diensbrief No A. 158/87 van 8/11/46 en Artikel 6(1) van Proklamiesie 9 van 1924; ib.

<sup>91</sup> Note: CNC (Eedes), 7.12.46; ib.

<sup>92</sup> CNC (Eedes) to Dir of Works/Mag Mt/Controller & Auditor General, 13.12.1946; ib.

<sup>93</sup> CNC to Adm through Accountant, SecSWA 17.10.1949; approved 24.10.1949; ib.

mandatory power. They are referred to here as they throw some further light on the rationale of South Africa's native reserve policy in Namibia and give also an idea of the albeit marginal restraints encountered by this policy due to the specific international status of the country before 1990.

The mandates commission lost little time to define the limited scope of its possible criticism regarding South Africa's performance as a mandatory power. Thus, its chairman stated unequivocally that there was

'no question of encouraging the natives to look beyond [South] Africa for their salvation'.<sup>94</sup>

In other words, South African control over Namibia was considered an accomplished fact which was there to stay. But there were a number of critical remarks already in 1925, at a time when the institutional set-up of the reserves was still not quite complete. It has been observed above that the knowledge of control by the League of Nations certainly did put a measure of restraint on the administration, e.g. in dealing with the labour question. As far as the reserves are concerned, queries in the mandates commission brought forth a few revealing statements by the South African representatives. These may help both to understand the design of the reserves policy as well as some of the turns the policy itself as well as its propaganda image were to take in the future.

The South African position on the fundamental question of citizenship was very blunt and clear. While 'European' inhabitants of the mandated territory were either South African citizens to begin with or given the option to acquire South African citizenship,

'native inhabitants [were] regarded as stateless subjects under the protection the Mandatory power'.<sup>95</sup>

This meant, in relation to the whole of the population of the territory, that citizenship was divided and that the greater part of the population was forced into a status where human beings were, under modern conditions of state-administered enforcement of the law and protection of fundamental rights, by definition in a position without statutory protection. Given the continued connection between the territory and its population, decreed statelessness may, in the Namibian case, have fallen short 'kill[ing] the juridical person in man' (Arendt 1986, p. 447), but it certainly did accentuate the unprotected state of African people in the face of an overwhelmingly powerful state and administrative regime - a special kind of colonial rule. This fundamental assertion by the South African authorities apparently went unchallenged in the Permanent Mandates Commission. But the policy of segregation which had been presented by South African representatives, including the administrator, G.R. Hofmeyr, in Geneva, met a mildly critical response. While accepting segregation in principle, the commission pointed out

'that under Article 22 of the Covenant, the mandatory Power is entrusted with a civilising mission which it obviously cannot carry out if the natives, being segregated

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<sup>94</sup> League of Nations: Permanent Mandates Commission] Provisional Minutes Seventh Meeting, held at 10 a.m. on June 30th, 1925 (OPM/6th Session/P.V. 8); NAN:SWAA A 394/7, v1.

<sup>95</sup> Status of the inhabitants of Territoires Under B. & C. mandates (n.d.); NAN:SWAA A 394/3; see also Memorial sent to Prime Minister, 31.7.1928; NAN:SWAA A 50/70 and SWAA a 394/3 Annexure for similar statements.

into reserves, are completely isolated and left to their own devices. It has therefore noted with particular interest the information concerning the means adopted by the mandatory Power to avoid such an undesirable result. It trusts that the next reports will include information enabling it to put on record the efforts, both to promote the evolution of a less rudimentary civilisation among the natives within their reserves and to facilitate the movement of those desirous of seeking employment outside their reserves, having been crowned by success. In particular, it will follow with interest the steps of the mandatory power to increase the number of schools, organise the administration of justice, and develop industrious habits among the natives.<sup>96</sup>

This set the tune for continuous queries, mainly about development initiatives in the reserves. The general mood of the commission may be summarised in acceptance of Namibia's *de facto* annexation by South Africa, which was brought in sharp relief by the citizenship issue; equally, acceptance of segregation in principle, where the commission took seriously, as it were, the ideology later dubbed as 'separate but equal'. From this flowed increasing criticism against concrete measures and trends of South African policy in Namibia, which may, however, be traced to the South African understanding of segregation which precisely precluded the levelling off of live chances and material standards, let alone rights.

The commission apparently was satisfied with the assertion by the administration in Windhoek, *via* South African diplomacy, that while 'natives' did not participate in the administration of the territory,

'in the native reserves and locations the headmen assist in maintaining order.'<sup>97</sup>

But this was different when it came to the paltry levels of expenditure for the reserves. The South African High Commissioner in Geneva, Smit,

'explained that the reserves were regarded as the properties of the native tribes held in trust for them by the Government. It did not seem to him right to devote the proceeds of the general revenue of the country to the improvement of the private property of a particular tribe of natives.'

For this, the reserve trust funds were declared responsible. Any large-scale public expenditure, Smit asserted,

'must be for be for a general object. The Administration ... felt obliged to request the natives to bear the expenses of developing their own special property within the reserves.'

In this way, South African diplomacy availed themselves of the argument which had been advanced by the Native Reserves Commission at the inception of reserve policy in Namibia. Then it had been mad abundantly clear that expending all the revenue raised

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<sup>96</sup> League of Nations. Permanent Mandates Commission. Report on the work of the Fourth Session of the Commission submitted to the Council of the League of Nations Geneva, July 16th, 1924 A.15. 1924.VI; NAN:SWAA 394/2.

<sup>97</sup> Replies to Questionnaire of the L of N Permanent Mandates Commission No A 14 1926 VI in Respect of the Mandated Territory of SWA; NAN:SWAA A 394/3 Annexure.



within the reserves also for objectives strictly limited to their requirements, would also serve as a means to dismiss any further demands deemed unreasonable by the administration (see above). The Mandates Commission at least did not swallow this wholesale. Its chairman replied that

'he would have thought that the providing of wells and the irrigation of the country might be regarded as a work of general public utility, and that the natives as inhabitants of the territory had a right to benefit from the general revenues and to require all necessary public services.'<sup>98</sup>

Implicitly, the emergent controversy was one of high principle. It concerned the question of how the 'community of citizens' (Schnapper 1994) was to be defined in Namibia under mandate. If there was to be unitary citizenship, as implied by the critics of South African policy, the argument of cutting up citizenry into separately taxable compartments was plainly untenable. Conversely, this attitude might find a certain coherence if such community was denied in the first place. This was exactly the line followed by the mandatory; it was expressed in a tangible and fundamental way by according South African citizenship to all 'white' inhabitants while declaring 'natives' as being in fact 'stateless'. Even in terms of the wording of the mandate, this alone was outrageous, although it was in accord with the understanding of permanent South African rule, which as such was not questioned in the League of Nations. The criticism articulated in the Mandates Commission stopped short of questioning South African rule, while counterposing the principle of segregation to that of equality:

'whilst the future of the territory was believed in, it was evidently a future for Europeans and not for the natives, who being segregated in reserves where there was practically no agriculture had naturally no prospects.'

One member of the Permanent Mandates Commission even articulated

'fear that the policy of segregation might lead to the unintentional disappearance of the native population as was the case in Australia and North America.'<sup>99</sup>

The criticism South African diplomacy encountered at the Permanent Mandates Commission seems to have hit a sensitive spot. At least this may be gauged from the directive response henceforth to react to queries from Geneva in a very restrictive way only. This internal guideline was laid down by the government in 1926/27 and reiterated on later occasions.<sup>100</sup> This did not hinder the administration's perseverance in the question of policy.

In its Annual Report for 1937, the administration, contradicting the views of the South West Africa Commission of 1936, stated its intention to discontinue spending 'out of the general revenue' for development of the reserves, claiming educational motives along the lines of self-help ideology:

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<sup>98</sup> League of Nations. Permanent Mandates Commission] Provisional Minutes Seventh Meeting, held at 10 a.m. on June 30th, 1925 (OPM/6th Session/P.V. 8); NAN:SWAA 394/7 v1.

<sup>99</sup> Report from Geneva to Sec for External Affairs Pretoria (n.d. carbon, end of June); NAN:SWAA A 73/10 v2.

<sup>100</sup> See correspondence on NAN:SWAA A 394/7 v2, also Departement van Buitelandse Sake to SekSWA, Pretoria 13.5.1936; NAN:SWAA A 73/16.

'The knowledge that they must depend on themselves is in itself a useful lesson. ... The residents know that new dams, windmills, fencing, schools, pedigree stock can be purchased when moneys are available in the Trust Funds and this is an inducement to them to go out and work to save the moneys required or to give their services in the Reserve. ...

The Administration ... holds that it would be unfair to burden the European section of the population with further taxes for native development when practically the whole of the native contribution to the revenue of the Territory is handed out to trust funds for expenditure on natives.' (UoSA 1938, p. 51, §§ 305, 306).

The commission report mentioned here had noted 'some justification' in these arguments which had been advanced to legitimate the tendency

'that the Administrator and the Legislative Assembly have always been disinclined to be too liberal with appropriations for services peculiarly in the interests of the Natives and were given in times of financial stringency to pruning such services first,'

precisely claiming the inequity 'further to tax the Europeans' for this. But the commission had pointed to the priority of the principle of a unitary territory and its overriding rationale in terms of economy and equity:

'The subject of the Mandate is the Territory and its inhabitants as a single entity. For years the mining revenue has been the mainstay of the Territory's finances. Such revenue is the yield of a capital and wasting asset, which belongs to the people of the Territory. The European's initiative and technical equipment did not create, but merely exploited the wealth. To this Native labour contributed.'

In addition, the mounting debt burdened 'the country as a whole'. The commission therefore had advised

'a more direct control of the allocation of funds to peculiarly European and Native services respectively.' (UoSA 1936, p. 75, §§ 384-386)

Criticism of administrative practice and further plans to curtail spending on development activities in the reserves was therefore not necessarily coterminous with any critique of segregationist policy or colonial rule. Rather, administrative practice in Namibia before 1937 and *a fortiori* after the administrative turn under discussion amounted to a further stiffening of an attitude that had come under attack even from within segregationist quarters. It was also criticised severely in the Permanent Mandates Commission at a time when the termination of mandates had been seen for some time as a possible perspective to be discussed provisionally at least.<sup>101</sup>

The Permanent Mandates Commission responded to the policy turn of the SWA Administration by pointing to inherent contradictions of the segregation principle, especially in the field of social policy. Its chairman stressed that

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<sup>101</sup> League of Nations. Sixtieth Session of the Council. Minutes. Second Meeting (Public, Then Private) Held on Tuesday September 9th, 1930, at 10.30 a.m.; excerpt on NAN:SWAA 73/11 v1, concerning a draft resolution of the Permanent Mandates Commission.



'the conception ... that a distinction should be drawn between the revenue derived from European taxpayers and revenue derived from native taxpayers, with the implication that the natives were strictly entitled to benefit from budget appropriations only in proportion of their contributions to general revenue [...] would prevent any social legislation to improve the position of the lower classes from being adopted. It was bound, in the Territory to keep alive in the European section of the population the presumption that any appropriation in the budget to ameliorate the conditions of the natives represented not an obligation, but an act of generosity from which the Administration was free to refrain.'<sup>102</sup>

This controversy was not resolved before the outbreak of World War II which brought the system of annual scrutiny by the Permanent Mandates Commission effectively to an end. Its importance lies not so much in any operative control but in prompting the SWA Administration and the Union government into fairly blunt statements of the considerations underlying their 'native' and reserve policies. These can be summarised as rationalizing a nascent form of what was to be known later as separate development.

It can be little surprise, therefore, that the framework laid down in justifying 'native' policy in general and reserve finance in particular during the 1930s, persisted in its basic features right through independence in 1990. There were important shifts, especially in the later emphasis on development which entailed the exigency of funding from central revenue.<sup>103</sup> But this was presented along the same lines of argument which had been invoked for repudiating such a policy in the 1930s. The only major change consisted in a shift towards stressing the magnimity of the white taxpayer instead of 'his' recalcitrance to consent to transfers. But this shift left untouched what was the central feature, the proposition of a dual or multiple instead of a unitary citizenry in Namibia. Precisely this idea had been challenged not only by the Permanent Mandates Commission but by the South West Africa Commission as well.

After World War II, under renewed pressure to justify their stance after the failed campaign for incorporation and the forceful advocacy of the case of the majority in Namibia by Michael Scott, the South African authorities went one step further from their argument in the Permanent Mandate's Commission. Now they presented the land question in Namibia not as one of dispossession, but of privileges for the indigenous peoples:

'The land in the Reserves is made available to non-Europeans free of charge except for a small grazing fee and, in consequence, it is essential that there should be stock limitations. The grazing fee is a fraction of what has to be paid for grazing outside the Reserves in the Police Zone. ... it is in the interests of the less affluent owners that the limitations have been imposed, but it is also in the interests of control and to prevent overstocking.'

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<sup>102</sup> Uncorrected proof of Minutes of Eighth Meeting [of Permanent Mandates Commission], 13.6.1938; NAN:SWAA A 73/18.

<sup>103</sup> This is apparent already in the reaction to U.N. queries shortly after World War II, see Reply of the Government of South Africa to the Trusteeship Council Questionnaire on the Report to the United Nations on the Administration of South West Africa for the Year 1946 (carbon copy; checked against printed version contained in same file from Trusteeship Council Official Records. Third Session. Supplement), reply to question 10; NAN:SWAA 73/27/1 Annexure A.

On a carbon copy of this letter to directed to Assistant Secretary Allen a strategy for justifying thhe South African stance was sketched out which flew directly into the face of the historical record of the 1920s in that it advised,

'... we should make it clear that the placing of Natives in the reserves was not an act of segregation, but aimed at protecting them and that they enjoy the same rights as the Europeans in regard to the acquisition of land outside the reserves. Moreover, the land in the reserves was made available free of charge except for a small grazing fee, whereas the land outside the reserves is held in private ownership and may be acquired by Europeans or Natives.'<sup>104</sup>

Such considerations were supplemented by the further argument that

'... whereas thousands of Natives (squatters or employees) live on land classified as European owned or occupied, very few Europeans (mostly officials, missionaries and traders) are permitted to enter or live in areas set aside for Non-Europeans.'<sup>105</sup>

And in the same vein, the South African department of external affairs requested from the administration in Windhoek specific data

'to bring home to our critics the extent to which European taxation "carries" Non-European welfare'<sup>106</sup>

This wish was met by a tabulation of welfare spending for different population groups. Similarly, secretary for S.W.A. Nesor in his capacity of chief native commissioner insisted on raising grazing fees specifically in Berseba reserve on the two counts that residents would be able to pay, but also, that they were under an obligation to do so:

'There is no doubt that more money is necessary for the development of the reserve. There is e.g. need for money to overcome the water shortage in many parts of the reserve ... Government has authorized already £ 5,000 for this purpose but shall definitely not be inclined to assist in the same manner in the future, if the inhabitants shall not be prepared to contribute more towards development goals.'<sup>107</sup>

This statement addressed a situation of obvious need. To overcome this, was defined basically as the responsibility of those directly affected. The government came in not as the representative of the larger community committed to burden sharing but as an agent of magnanimity and at the same time, of enforcing discipline by honouring proper behaviour in the form of additional funds while punishing recalcitrance by withholding further 'assistance'.

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<sup>104</sup> Notes for response to U.N., under covering/fowarding letter by Nesor to D. Sole, c/o SecExtAff, both at Cape Town, 26.8.1948; NAN:SWAA A 73/27/1 v2.

<sup>105</sup> Acting SecSWA [L.H. Ambler] to SecSWA at Cape Town, 10.8.1948; NAN:SWAA A 73/27/1 v1.

<sup>106</sup> D.B. Sole, Dpt. of Ext. Affairs, Cape Town to Allen (SWAA), 4.8.1948; ib.

<sup>107</sup> CNC (Nesor) to Mag/NC Kh, 29.9.1954; NAN:SWAA A 158/3/1.

## 7. Development initiatives between local endeavour and centralist control

Development initiatives that did take place were burdened with the centralist procedures of the administration. In the concrete execution of these measures, the administration's paternalist basic attitude is brought out graphically, favouring white experts' knowledge and expertise over any knowledge and also over much of the initiative exhibited by the indigenes.

The main fields where development initiatives can be discerned during the initial decades of the reserves were fencing and infrastructural improvements, stock upgrading and above all, the central issue of water provision. Especially the last two are indicative for the over-all attitude taken by the administration.

From the late 1920s, there was an articulate interest, as testified in the administration's files, among the inhabitants of several southern reserves to improve their livestock. An initiative to this end by chief Johannes Christiaan Goliath of Berseba in 1925 led to some correspondence within the administration,<sup>108</sup> but apparently did not yield concrete results, apart from the admission by the officer in charge on 'the absence of any knowledge of the conditions prevailing in the Reserve', which did not bar him from making a recommendation.<sup>109</sup> Early in 1927, magistrates were asked to report on the question, and there was considerable interest in stock improvement. Thus in Berseba,

'Capt. [Andries] Goliath and his Raad are very keen to improve their stock by means of good bulls. They wish to have 10 to commence with and will appoint a Committee consisting of myself and 3 or 4 Hottentots to decide which bulls should be emasculated. I suggest the Veterinary Officer be added. ... The distribution to be left in the hands of Goliath.'<sup>110</sup>

The magistrate of Gibeon stressed that according to progressive farmers interviewed on the matter, Afrikander Bulls should be procured, 'as the veld is very stony', and they should 'always be running with the stock of the Natives'; also with regard to Tses reserve, it was noted the poor quality of grazing required 'only the most hardy animals.'<sup>111</sup> Such initiatives, as well as further moves mentioned below, give little credence to the official view of the administration, that the main obstacles to stock improvement was that 'the conservatism of the native has to be overcome'.<sup>112</sup>

In these responses, main points were already contained around which debates on and day-to-day struggle for development were to revolve: the difficulties of the environment in southern Namibia, the control of inferior 'scrub' bulls and more generally, breeding stock to

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<sup>108</sup> qu. in Sup Berseba/Tses to Mag Kh. 16.2.1925; see also SecSWA to Officer in Charge Agricultural and Veterinary Services, 24.2.1925; NAN:SWAA A 217/3 v1.

<sup>109</sup> Officer in Charge Agricultural and Veterinary Services to SecSWA, 10.3.1925; see also, dto., 2.3.1925; both ib..

<sup>110</sup> Sup Tses Native Reserve [also responsible for Berseba] to Mag Kh, 21.3.1927; similar sentiments were reported in particular from the Bondels reserve, see Mag Warmbad to CNC, 3.3.1927; NAN:SWAA A50/47.

<sup>111</sup> Mag Gib, 22.2.1927; Sup Tses to Mag Kh, 21.3.1927; ib.

<sup>112</sup> NAN:SWAA A 73/11 v2 § 590 of native affairs report.



ensure improvement of the herds, and the role of the white administration vis-à-vis the reserve inhabitants. The suggestion to give the Berseba *Kaptein* a direct and important say was an exception, as is borne out by subsequent developments. Even then, the magistrate responsible for the Bondels reserve stressed that all stud bulls were to be kept at reserve headquarters at Dreihoeck, 'under the direct supervision of the Superintendent in proper stables' to be sent out periodically to 'notified centres'.<sup>113</sup> Apparently, also this time the matter did not get any further than recommendations and administrative correspondence.

Actual procurement of stud bulls was effected during the late 1930s, in response to an inquiry by the Union government. The 'Herero' reserves of Otjimbingue and Aminuis had already been provided with stud bulls when concrete planning got under way for the southern reserves.<sup>114</sup> In January 1940, 11 bulls for Berseba finally were expected at Tses railway station.<sup>115</sup> Upon the reported death of one animal in December 1940, the central administration reacted with calls for stiff measures, since the dead animal had not been herded: The welfare officer replied he had

'already given strict instructions to both headmen, as far as the care and supervision of the remaining bulls is concerned,'

while the magistrate added that 'Hottentots simply will not herd their stock'. The central administration suggested a 'threat to withdraw the stud bulls', which after all had been purchased from the reserve trust fund. The welfare officer again assured he would hand down this threat and draw up a list of persons 'personally held responsible by me for the bulls under their care ... they will have to pay'. An inspection report less than half a year later said 'all ... are in good condition ... well cared for', having been able to inspect three of the six bulls in the reserve.<sup>116</sup> The problem of herding on an extensive area like Berseba with often sparse and above all intermittent grazing was not addressed in these exchanges. Plans for the acquisition of additional stud bulls were frustrated when the devastating drought of 1945 forced the evacuation of 13 animals to Otjohorongo and Okombahe reserves in the North.<sup>117</sup> When six of them returned three years later, there were renewed complaints of the two headmen not caring properly for them; the death of one animal was once again blamed by the authorities on insufficient supervision by the headmen.<sup>118</sup>

In a country where farming with small stock predominates, the upgrading of goats and sheep was bound to be of major importance. Here again, initiative was on the side of reserve residents, and again, this initiative was met by cumbersome administrative procedure and paternalist attitudes.

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<sup>113</sup> Mag Warmbad to CNC, 3.3.1927; ib.

<sup>114</sup> Inquiry by Secretary for Native Affairs, Pretoria 23.11.1936; reply by SecSWA 7.12.1936; note CNC, 12.10.1937; undated list (c. 1938/9) on Reserve Trust Fund credit balances and magistrates' recommendations; NAN:SWAA A 50/47 v1.

<sup>115</sup> W/O Tses & Berseba Native Reserves to Mag Kh, 11.1.1940; NAN:SWAA A 50/47/5 v1; from the context, it emerges that the 11 bulls were divided up between Berseba and Tses.

<sup>116</sup> W/O to NC Kh, 24.12.1940; CNC to Mag/NC Kh n.d.; W/O to NC Kh, 14.1.1941; Mag to CNC, 22.1.1941; CNC (D.D.Forsyth) to Mag & NC Kh n.d.; W/O to Mag Kh 7.2.1941; Office of Government Veterinary Officer to Mag Kh, 27.6.1941; all ib.

<sup>117</sup> CNC to Mag Outjo, 16.5.1945; W/O Berseba/Tses to CNC, 15.6.1945; Mag Outjo to CNC, 7.7.1945; ib.

<sup>118</sup> W/O Tses/Berseba to NC Kh, 10.4.1948; W/O Tses/Berseba to NC Kh, 1.6.1948; W/O, Extract from Monthly Report on the Berseba Reserve for the Month of July 1948; CNC to Mag/NC Kh, 19.8.1948; ib.



After the unusually good rains of 1933, a garden scheme had been started in Krantzplatz reserve. Part of these gardens were to provide fodder for Swiss goat rams which the administration undertook to obtain for upgrading of the local flock. The reserve board resolved in favour of the plan in March and again in April 1933. At that time, it was expected that the animals could be obtained 'within a month', and Fritz Gerdes, who was a teacher at the Rhenish Mission industrial school situated at reserve headquarters, to be put in charge.<sup>119</sup> The application for authority to buy the rams was turned down by the veterinary department.<sup>120</sup> There were sustained efforts both before and after to secure suitable animals from farmers in the district and the kind of animal required was extensively discussed at the monthly board meetings.<sup>121</sup> In April 1934, a further board meeting resolved on the same issue, again pointing out that it was possible to obtain animals locally. The magistrate followed this up early in October, pointing to the successes farmers in the district had achieved with Swiss rams.<sup>122</sup> In February 1935, the magistrate, in a private letter, referred to the 'industrious' development activities lately of 'the Witboois in the Gibeon Reserve' and inquired about the position concerning the application for rams:

'Unfortunately the Gibeon Natives have seen what a success the "Toggenbergers" are in these parts and they are dubious about taking the "Saanen" type, and the fodder bill for them would be too high. The Toggenbergers privately owned just graze with the common stock ...'<sup>123</sup>

Upon this information, authority to obtain the rams was at last conveyed.<sup>124</sup> The animals were placed under a locally recruited herd, but control remained with the central administration. Thus, when the remaining four goats were considered in 'very bad condition' and old, this was reported to Windhoek, and the magistrate in his capacity as native commissioner was told from there to 'hold a Board of Survey on the goats' on his next visit, to report in quadruplicate and make recommendations for disposal of the animals.<sup>125</sup> This experience again exhibits both administrative centralism and mistrust in any expertise on the side of 'natives'. The reserve residents were inhibited for two years to act on their own initiative and knowledge and to expend the funds raised from themselves for their own ends.

A particular instance was karakul farming. Here, white farming interests were seen to be threatened by African competition while at the same time, a certain rift appears between the central administration and local officials. The mid-1930s saw a rapid conversion of settler farming in southern Nambibia to this lucrative branch, and at first, this was subsidized heavily by administration funds. Only after heavy drought losses did the administration shift the risks onto individual farmers (cf. Silvester 1993, pp. 271-275). Groups in the reserves showed various initiatives to participate in the karakul boom, but

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<sup>119</sup> Excerpt from Reserve Board Meeting 24.4.1933; excerpt from also Reserve Board Meeting (?), 22.3.1933; Mag Mt to SecSWA, 14.3.1933; NAN:SWAA A 50/47/1.

<sup>120</sup> Senior veterinary surgeon to CNC 1.5.1933; ib.

<sup>121</sup> Minutes of Monthly Meetings, 8.4.1933, 5.8.1933, 2.2.1934; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1.

<sup>122</sup> Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents (25), 7.4.1934;ib, and on NAN:SWAA A 50/47/1; Mag Mtal to Sec 2.10.1934; ib.

<sup>123</sup> quoted in minute to SecSWA, 14.2.1935; ib. Throughout, "Toggenberger" is misspelt for "Toggenburger".

<sup>124</sup> SecSWA to Mag Mt, 21.2.1935; Senior Veterinary Surgeon, Wh, to Mag Mt, 19.3.1935; ib.

<sup>125</sup> NC Mt to CNC, 6.2.1940; CNC to NC Mt, 10.2.1940; ib.; the affair closed by the report, NC Mt to CNC 9.4.1940; ib.

these were, to all appearances, stifled effectively. A request by the 'Berseba tribe' in 1933 to finance the purchase of 500 sheep and five karakul rams from the tribal fund, to be payed back from later proceeds, was deferred until sufficient rain had created suitable conditions.<sup>126</sup> When, in June 1934, the magistrate of Keetmanshoop again conveyed to Windhoek the wish of the Berseba Raad to move into the karakul line, he was told

'that this matter should stand over until I have had an opportunity of discussing it with you'.<sup>127</sup>

This is where the matter was laid to rest, as far as the written record can tell. A few years later, a similar recommendation by the special justice of the peace at Maltahöhe to procure karakuls for the small reserve of Neuhof explicitly was refused by the executive committee in Windhoek. In spite of several representations by officials, the committee held fast to this position.<sup>128</sup> This was reiterated in response to similar requests.<sup>129</sup> In 1955, the executive committee openly motivated its unwillingness to let reserve residents move into the karakul market by fear that otherwise, low-quality pelts might be placed on the market.<sup>130</sup> Here, fear of raising competitors to the established karakul farmers was veiled only thinly. This attitude was reversed only with the onset of more vigorous 'development' initiatives after 1960. Thus, the Odendaal Plan named karakul farming as practically the only viable perspective for the proposed Namaland homeland (see RoSA 1964, §§ 1247, 1248).

Besides improvement of stock, the overriding concern in most areas of southern Namibia was bound to be water. Here, a similar picture pertains as in the case of the introduction of stud animals. The water position in Berseba seemed rather unproblematic at the beginning of South African rule, so that there appeared to be no need for boreholes.<sup>131</sup> Early in the severe drought around 1930, it was reported on the contrary that the situation was 'the most disastrous' in memory and the main problem lay not in carrying capacity which had not been reached by far,

'but unfortunately the number of water holes are limited to those actually necessary in normal years'.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Petition, Berseba 18.10.1933; SecSWA (H. P. Smit) to Mag Kh, 16.11.1933; NAN: SWAA A 560/8.

<sup>127</sup> Mag Kh [J.M. van Niekerk] to SecSWA 19.6.1934; SecSWA to Mag Kh, 12.9.1934; NAN: SWAA A 50/47/5.

<sup>128</sup> Annual Inspection of the Neuhof Native Reserve, Maltahohe, extract from Minute No. 2/13/5 dated 22.7.44 from special justice of the peace Maltahohe; CNC to special justice of the peace Mh, 5.8.1944; reply by Mag Mh 25.9.44; CNC to senior veterinary officer, 18.10.1944; same to CNC, 20.10.1944; Legislative Assembly, EC 6.11.1944, Minute No. 205/44; Administrator/Secretary, Memorandum 29.12.1944; EC, 6.1.1945 (§ 30/45); handwritten note and subsequent stamps: resubmitted, 30.9.1948, 20.12.1948, 30.6.1949; extract from Minutes of Annual Meeting Held in the Neuhof Reserve on the 8th December, 1948; NAN:SWAA A 50/47/14.

<sup>129</sup> Mag Mt to CNC, 24.10.1951; NAN:SWAA A 50/47/1.

<sup>130</sup> Minute 28.1.1955 and handwritten note, 11.2.1955 (Administrator-in-Executive-Comittee); NAN:SWAA A 50/47 v2.

<sup>131</sup> Mag Kh Report aangaande myn Inspektie der Naturellen en hunne Bewaarplaatsen, 15.10.1920; NAN:SWAA A 158/1 v1; Sup Tses to Mag Kh, 12.5.28, stating that where water was needed it could be tapped 4 ft. beneath surface; NAN:SWAA A 158/51/8.

<sup>132</sup> NAN:SWAA 73/11 v2, § 556 of native affairs report.

Similarly, during the early 1940s, with a continually deteriorating water situation and wells falling dry consecutively, officials stressed that although 'we have sufficient water',

unfortunately ... this water is not on the right spots. ... In those portions of the reserve where grazing is still to be had, there is no water.<sup>133</sup>

Therefore, classical 'development' work would be called for, especially the sinking of boreholes. Again for 1945, another particularly severe drought year, the report stated that 'the water situation in the reserve is critical' and that the main bottleneck was of administrative nature as

'several new boreholes have been authorised but it has been found impossible to secure the services of a boring contractor to sink them.'<sup>134</sup>

There was considerable activity to improve the water situation at Krantzplatz Reserve from the early 1930s onwards. Altogether, two dams were built to make use of grazing farther removed from the Fish River; wells were sunk both to provide water for people and animals and to water small gardens in the river bed; a road was built to reach very good grazing on the Kalk Plateau which rises steeply from the plain around Gibeon, and there followed years of continuous squabbles over the opening of water in this area, which was a necessary pre-condition for making use of the grazing as soon as the shallow pans had dried up a few weeks after the rains.

Krantzplatz reserve, which had been proclaimed in 1924, had, according to the magistrate's report, a 'sufficient ... but undeveloped' supply of water in 1929/30.<sup>135</sup> Water supply was limited largely to wells and waterholes in the Fish River. There was another well near reserve headquarters which had been a German military station.<sup>136</sup> Around 1930, the water situation, in spite of the drought, gave reason to try out a number of garden schemes in the river bed, which were frustrated after a few years by floods as well as by failing rains. The main emphasis in the field of water provision therefore lay on ensuring year-round possibilities for the watering of stock in a way that made possible an exhaustive use of existing grazing and also, to ensure that water was available for people to drink. This involved the procurement and keeping in order of pumps and windlasses, the digging of wells and the building of dams and finally, the drilling of boreholes. In addition, some road-building was required to access grazing on the Kalk Plateau. Any action that involved outlay in money had to be approved in Windhoek; appliances such as pumps were procured in Windhoek or vouchers were sent down to Gibeon to be used by the magistrate or superintendent. Work for 'development' was performed by reserve residents in the digging of wells, the laying out of gardens, the building of dams and roads. Payment for this out of the reserve fund was a further important issue.

The need for a pump had first been raised in June 1929, and the provision of one, the exact makes and the merits of different varieties were a matter of discussion in the monthly reserve board meetings for much of 1930. The residents, arguing from their experience,

<sup>133</sup> CNC to Mag/NC Kh, 12.4.41; NAN:SWAA A 158/51/8.

<sup>134</sup> NAN:SWAA 73/11 v1, Subfile 11. Native Reserves (x) Water Supplies [1946].

<sup>135</sup> Mag Gib (Ninow), report of the Superintendent of the Krantzplatz Native Reserve in the district of Gibeon for December 1929, Gibeon, 4.2.1930; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v2.

<sup>136</sup> cf. Bericht über die Kirchen- und Schulvisitation in Gibeon vom 15. bis 21. Juni 1913 (Wandres); VEM/RMG 2.500 v1.



finally succeeded in carrying through their decision for a diaphragm pump which was installed in October, 1930. It was installed by Fritz Gerdes, the teacher of the Rhenish Mission industrial school which had taken over the former military buildings. Significantly, the minutes of the reserve board meeting, obviously worded by the magistrate, noted that 'the residents are very grateful for this improvement'.<sup>137</sup> Thus, the merit was claimed for the administration, while the reserve residents were presented as recipients of the former's bounty. Of course this amounted to turning much of the actual course of events on its head and thereby, effecting a redistribution of credits much in favour of the administration.

The most protracted issue around water procurement in the Krantzplatz reserve revolved around the repeated attempts to secure open water for the watering of stock on the Kalk Plateau in the eastern part of the reserve. The plateau rises steeply from the plain, the escarpment following roughly a North-South direction. This area was considered as the 'best grazing ground on the Reserve'.<sup>138</sup> A road was built by reserve residents during the early 1930s to afford easier access.<sup>139</sup> But still, the area could only be grazed during the short few weeks or months immediately after rains, before the shallow *vleis* had dried up. Therefore, a longer-lasting supply of open water was a high priority for the inhabitants of a small and rather cramped reserve such as Krantzplatz. The potential salutary effects as well as the feasibility of digging wells and drilling boreholes there must have been obvious to reserve residents, since the settlement of Boer farmers on the plateau had been made possible only by precisely such action. By the late 1920s, more than 100 farmers were settled on an area 'where eight or ten years ago, there was only waterless steppe', as the resident Rhenisch missionary explained, who also attributed the drying up of many wells in Gibeon to these changes.<sup>140</sup> As migrant farm workers, shearing teams etc. served the farmers in the district, knowledge about such improvements was inevitable. Under such auspices therefore, the saga of the boreholes stands out as a particularly telling example of administrative highhandedness as well as of the way the administration handled concrete issues of improvements in the reserves. At the same time, the issue the validity of local knowledge in contradistinction to the claims of expertise residing in the Windhoek-based technical staffs became increasingly prominent over the decades.

The idea of sinking a borehole on the part of the Kalk Plateau belonging to Krantzplatz reserve was raised as early as 1930.<sup>141</sup> Pointing to previous, fruitless attempts in the lower area, the magistrate at that stage specified that a new borehole 'should be on the Plateau'.<sup>142</sup> The boring operations which got underway around May 1931 proved

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<sup>137</sup> Minutes of Meeting of Reserve Board and Residents held at Krantzplatz at 5 p.m. on 3.11.1930; and see various minutes of board meetings from June 1929 through November 1930; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1.

<sup>138</sup> Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board & Residents held at Krantzplatz at 11 a.m. on 10.10.1931; ib.

<sup>139</sup> Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held at Krantzplatz at 5 p.m. on 1.4.1931 (sic; should be 1.5.1931); Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held in the Schoolroom at Krantzplatz at 4 p.m. on 5.6.1931; ib.

<sup>140</sup> Halbjahrsbericht vom 1. Oktober 1928 bis 31. März 1929, Gibeon, 2. April 1928 (Christian Spellmeyer) VEM/RMG 2.500.

<sup>141</sup> cf. Minutes of Meeting of Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held at 5 p.m. on 7.10.1930; NAN:SWAA 158/6 v1; Minutes of Meeting of Reserve Board & Residents of the Gibeon Native Reserve held in the School Room at Krantzplatz at 5 p.m. on 1.12.1930;

<sup>142</sup> Minutes of Meeting of Reserve Board and Residents held at Krantzplatz at 5 p.m. on 3.11.1930; ib.



unsuccessful.<sup>143</sup> The building of dams and wells in the plain immediately beneath the escarpment was undertaken immediately after this failure<sup>144</sup> but offered no definite solution of the problem, despite the lasting improvement effected with the erection of the 'Herero Dam' in the Falkenhorst section of the reserve and later of the 'Klein Dam', situated even nearer to the escarpment of the Kalk Plateau.<sup>145</sup> The request for boreholes remained a recurrent theme for many years. It was raised by *Kaptein* David Witbooi at the annual meeting of the reserve residents in 1939 and met with the response by the magistrate that repairs at the dam had priority.<sup>146</sup> But he noted in his report to his superiors that

'the Krantzplatz Reserve is rather small for the amount of stock which is kept there right now and it is therefore necessary to make water available in all parts of the Reserve,'

suggesting a well as a temporary solution.<sup>147</sup> In Windhoek, the Works Department insisted that experience with digging and drilling on the Kalk were not promising, advising to construct a *gatdam* instead.<sup>148</sup> In this case of undisputed urgency, it took a full five months to reach a decision that meant little more than to keep the matter in suspense. The call for one or more boreholes was repeated in connection with the drawing up of five year plans stating development priorities were drawn up for the reserves.<sup>149</sup> Also in the face of the support this project received from the incumbent Welfare Officer, the Works Department insisted that on the Kalk Plateau, 'drilling must be considered as highly speculative'.<sup>150</sup> Eventually, objections by the Works Department were upheld by the administration; instead of drilling, existing *vleis* were to be deepened.<sup>151</sup> The administration also pointed to the high cost of boreholes and to the low receipts expected for the reserve trust fund.<sup>152</sup> This is where the matter seems to have rested for a while and attention was focused on dam building and repair, both on the side of the residents<sup>153</sup> and certainly on that of the administration.<sup>154</sup> In late 1945, a year of severe drought, things took a new turn when the Works Department initiated moves to drill two boreholes along the Fish River in order to safeguard water

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<sup>143</sup> cf. Mag Gib (Ninow), report of the Superintendent of the Krantzplatz Native Reserve in the district of Gibeon for May 1931, dto. July 1931, both dated Gibeon, 21.8.1931; Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board & Residents held in the School Room at Krantzplatz on 3.7.1931; all ib.

<sup>144</sup> cf. Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board & Residents held in the Mission School at Krantzplatz at 4 p.m. on 4.9.1931; dto at 11 a.m. on 10.10.1931; ib.

<sup>145</sup> see, i.a., Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held at Gibeon on Saturday 8.4.1933; ib.

<sup>146</sup> Notule van die Jaarlikse Algemene vergadering vir die jaar 1939 gehou te Krantzplatz op 24.10.1939 om 8 uur v.m.; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v1.

<sup>147</sup> Mag Mt (le Roux) to CNC, 31 Oct 1939; ib.

<sup>148</sup> cf. CNC to Dir of Works, 11.11.1939; Dep of Works to CNC, 1.4.1940; ib.. A *gatdam* involves a dam to collect water, thereby raising the water face which then can be reached by a well or borehole.

<sup>149</sup> Mag Mt to CNC, 11.7.1940; NAN:SWAA 158/51/4.

<sup>150</sup> Dir of Works to CNC, 19.10.1940; cf. W/O Kp (Gerdes) to Mag Mt, 2.10.1940; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v1.

<sup>151</sup> Dpt of Works to CNC, 15.7.1941; SecSWA to Adm, 1.2.1941; SecSWA to Adm, 18.7.1941; NAN:SWAA A 158/51/4.

<sup>152</sup> Sec to Adm, 1.2.1941, l.c.

<sup>153</sup> cf. request by David Witbooi, Uittreksel uit die Notule van Jaarlikse Algemene Vergadering van die Krantzplatz-Reserveraad, Gehou op 27.10.1943; ib.

<sup>154</sup> cf. Adm to Dir of Works, 24.6.1942, 10.7.1942; Mag Mt to CNC, 26.2.1944, 11.4.1944, 2.8.1944; Dir of Works to CNC, 16.8.1944, 20.12.1944; AddNC to CNC, 21.12.1944; Adm to Dir of Works, 4.1.1945; all ib.

supply.<sup>155</sup> The representation of the magistrate that open water in the Fish River was sufficient 'even in dry years as now'<sup>156</sup>, was unsuccessful for the time being. A delegation in the name of the 'Witbooi nation (*volk*)' had forcefully given expression to the current situation:

'... we feel extremely pressed to draw your utmost attention as a father to our most serious difficulty with the *Water, Water*.

'We ask you hereby in earnest at least to let drill one borehole on the kalk for us. And one near to the borderline in the west, opposite Frystatt.'

The pointed out further that 'water which is used up to now in some places is bitterly bracky and altogether no use.'<sup>157</sup> Apparently, the central administration was prepared to move at this time. The magistrate was told from Windhoek that 'a few boreholes along the river' should be drilled for immediate relief, whereas experience had shown that boring on the Kalk was a waste of time and money; later, there would be fresh investigations into the possibilities.<sup>158</sup> A few months later, the administration decided that on account of the rains that had fallen meanwhile, 'there was no urgent need to provide water for the stock of the natives in Krantzplatz'. The established opinion within the administration, that 'boreholes could only be sunk on the banks of the river' was once more affirmed. The 'boring outfit' active in the region should therefore proceed 'direct to Tses.'<sup>159</sup> Eventually, 'the proposal to bore in the Kranzplatz Reserve [was] abandoned indefinitely'.<sup>160</sup> Five months later, however, at the annual meeting at Krantzplatz, the magistrate claimed that

'as you know, the provision of further water facilities is delayed due to lack of machinery'.

On account of this, the upkeep of existing installations would take on all the greater importance.<sup>161</sup> Obviously, the matter coincided at this time with the large repairs at the Herero Dam mentioned above, but this was not cited as a reason even in internal correspondence of the administration. In any case, there was a clear preference on all levels of the administration for dams, above all for extension and deepening of the existing two beneath the Kalk escarpment.<sup>162</sup> Conversely, people in the reserve persisted in their demand for boreholes. At the annual meeting at November 1947, this plea was linked with an assertion of local competence as well as with reference to its limits:

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<sup>155</sup> cf. Dir of Works (O. Wipplinger) to Mag Mt, 18.10.1945; Mag Mt to CNC 26.10.1946; Dir of Works (J.W. van Niekerk) to CNC, 26.2.1946; ib.

<sup>156</sup> Mag Mt to SecSWA, 2.11.1945 (Confidential); NAN:SWAA 158/6 v2.

<sup>157</sup> Petition, undersigned by Kaptein David Witbooi, Councillors Salomon Witbooi, Welem Frederik and Johannes Jakob, Kransplaas Reservaat. 11. Augustus. 1945; ib.; Frystatt or Freistadt, situated to the West of Gibeon, is one of the three farms which made up the reserve.

<sup>158</sup> SecSWA/CNC (P.R.Botha) to Mag Mt, 8.11.1945 (Confidential); ib.

<sup>159</sup> SecSWA to AssSec, AddCNC, Dir of Works n.d. [received SecSWA 1.4.1946]; CNC to Mag Mt, 8.4.1946; ib.

<sup>160</sup> CNC to Dir of Works/Mag Mt, 2.5.1946; ib.

<sup>161</sup> Krantzplatz Naturelle Reserwe. Notule van jaarlikse Algemenevergadering [sic] gehou te Krantzplatz op Vrydag 4 Oktober 1946, om 4 n.m. ooreenkomstig Art. 5 van Proklamasie Np. 9 van 1942; ib.

<sup>162</sup> see also NAN:SWAA A 73/27 v1, Subfile 11: Native Reserves (x) Water Supplies [1946]; the same report mentions difficulties to find boring contractors to drill authorized holes in Berseba and Tses reserves, as well as difficulties to supply adequate windmills for pumping. This may also account for the restrictive attitude concerning Krantzplatz.

'there are five of us who make wells but we cannot go further, for we cannot get through the reef, someone has to come and blast this for us.'<sup>163</sup>

The identification of persons who were allowed to handle dynamite, or considered as competent and trustworthy to do so, was a recurrent theme in the debates on reserve board meetings. Of course, this was also bound to bring home a feeling of dependence, especially as long as no one within the reserve was entrusted with the job. Even then, the recurrent preference for persons categorized as 'Coloured' or 'Baster' is a clear pointer to structural as well as to acute discrimination.<sup>164</sup> Finally, restrictions on the use of dynamite are to be understood not only on account of its inherent dangers but in the context of the generally tight control exercised on any weapons in the possession of 'natives'. But the wrangles around boreholes on the Kalk continued well into the 1950s. There were requests for a geologue to be despatched to look for suitable sites,<sup>165</sup> and the request for boreholes on the Kalk was reiterated.<sup>166</sup> A drilling attempt made in October 1950 was unsuccessful and stopped at 200 ft. depth.<sup>167</sup> But this did not settle the issue. During the following months, the supply and especially the quality of water deteriorated to a point where the relatively newly appointed and fairly active Welfare Officer Festus Balt reported that 'water is so bad now that neither men nor beasts can drink it any more'. Stock was lost due to 'bad water'.<sup>168</sup>

At meetings, people became more insistent and outspoken. *Kaptein* David Witbooi led the demand for government assistance with food and dynamite, so that 'we ourselves shall do the work'. But harsher sentiments were articulated as well:

'It is only because we are Kaffirs that there is no water on the Kalk, and as there is no water, we must pay our levies all the time.'

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<sup>163</sup> Uittreksel uit Notule van Jaarlikse Algemene Vergadering van Inwoners van Krantzplatz Reserve, Gehou op 22/10/47 (interventions by Johannes Jacob and Hendrik Witbooi); NAN:SWAA A 158/87.

<sup>164</sup> Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board & Residents held in the School Room at Krantzplatz at 11 a.m. on Saturday, 7.11.1931; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1; Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve and residents held in the Court Room at Gibeon at 4 p.m. on 5.10.1934; Krantzplatz Naturelle Reserve. Notule van jaarlikse Algemene vergadering gehou te Krantzplatz op Woensdag, 22 Oktober 1947, om 10 uur v.m. ooreenkomstig Art. 5 van Proklamasie Np. 9 van 1942; both ib. v2.

<sup>165</sup> cf. Notule van Vegadering gehou op 17 Maart, 1948, te Windhoek van die Hoofman en Raadslede von die Krantuplatz Reserve en die Addisionele Naturellekommissaris, intervention by *Kaptein* David Witbooi; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v3.

<sup>166</sup> cf. CNC (Bruwer Blignaut for H.J.Allen) to Mag/NC Mt, 14.9.1950, reporting on meeting held by Allen on Krantzplatz, 26.7.1950; ib.

<sup>167</sup> cf. W/O to Mag/NC 30.9.1950; Report of the Welfare Officer of the Krantzplatz Native Reserve for the Month of October 1950. Balt, Krantzplatz, 30.10.1950; both ib.

<sup>168</sup> Berigtes van die Welsynsbeampte: Reservaat Kransplatz vir die maand Sept 1951, Balt, Krantzplatz, 29.9.1951; cf. dto Jan 1952, 31.1.1952; and Voor-sitting vir die Reservaat inwoners vir versoeke aan Mnr. Allen en die owerheid van die land, 7.6.1951; all ib.



Others saw these brawls as futile and pleaded for the opening up of water to the West of the Fish River.<sup>169</sup> But as will be seen, such views were not without foundation, given the differential treatment of water difficulties received at that time by the Welfare Officer.

A few weeks later, *Kaptein* David Witbooi, still insisting on boreholes and rejecting the proposals for dams, summed up the long story:

'I have been talking to eight Magistrates about the water here on Kransplatz, but up to now we have not yet got any water. We are too stupid to indicate [spots for boring for] water but there are old farmers here with good knowledge of water, and we want that the Government will let these farmers indicate water for us.'<sup>170</sup>

Obviously, this was an attempt to turn the existing prejudices about the incompetence of 'natives' around to push the administration into urgently desired action. Shortly thereafter, *Kaptein* Witbooi and his councillors directed an actual outcry to the government, which gives an idea of their anguish over the water situation:

'But the Eternal complaint which we have over Water is always the first which we have in the Reserve. On the Kalk and on Kransplaas and on the other side of the Fish River two spots to Bore.. But this seems all in vain; but we feel not yet like giving up, but it seems to us that we should just stop asking and hold still. Until the will of the Law is one day fulfilled! after our death: Shall we here in the Reserve get Water: Or What?'

According to a marginal note, then Assistant CNC H.J. Allen had 'replied ... at my meeting on 4/8/52'.<sup>171</sup> However, when requests from a number of persons came in who claimed to have dug wells successfully and now asked that the administration made good on Allen's promise for help with pumping gear,<sup>172</sup> the latter asked in a rather personal letter to the Welfare Officer whether he actually had made such a promise.<sup>173</sup> Balt replied in a similarly familiar tone that upon a relevant question

'you have answered that any person who opens strong water on a suitable spot, the government shall help with a wind-motor etc.'<sup>174</sup>

The further development of this initiative could not be traced. Still, the episode can demonstrate a certain laxness within the administration in terms of its own internal dealings, file keeping and keeping track of their own decisions and pronouncements. It is further

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<sup>169</sup> Extract from Minutes of a Quarterly Meeting Held in the Krantzplatz Native Reserve on the 25th September 1951, interventions by David Witbooi, Petrus Jacob, Jacob Kamadam; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v2.

<sup>170</sup> W/O Kp to Mag/NC Mt, 29.1.52. Samesprekings Gehou deur Mnr Marais & Hoofmanne & Raadslede: Kransplatz; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v3.

<sup>171</sup> Kapt. David Witbooi to CNC (Allen), stamped W/O Kp, 1.8.52; NAN:SWAA A 159/87 v2; as in former Witbooi petitions and representations, 'Law' (or Afr. 'die Wet') designates summarily the government; capitalization and interpunction have been preserved from the Afrikaans document..

<sup>172</sup> see Markus Korasip to CNC, 7.8.1952; similar applications by Jacob Klaasen and Salmon Jacob mentioned in forwarding letter W/O Kp to Mag/NC Mt, 9.8.1952; all ib.

<sup>173</sup> Allen to Balt, 10.8.1952; ib.

<sup>174</sup> Balt to Allen, 15.9.1952; ib. The letter, while under the official letter head, is simply signed, 'hearty greetings, Festus'. No minutes of the meeting of 4.8.1952 could be found either on SWAA A 158/6 or SWAA A 158/87.



clear from the record that in spite of all representations, the administration kept fast to its line not to authorize boreholes while promoting dam construction.<sup>175</sup> The necessity of some action to alleviate the water and thereby also the grazing situation was brought home on the administration also from quite different quarters when the agriculture department sounded alarm and implied, by the same token the total inadequacy of the existing reserve:

'The area between the Fish River and Die Kalk should be vacated for a period of at least 6 years in order that some recovery in the veld can be encouraged as conditions in this sector are verging on those of a desert.

'In order to rest this portion of the Reserve it is essential to create water supplies ... for which the amount of £ 2500, promised by the Chief Native Commissioner for the development of water in the Reserve, will not be sufficient.

'The creation of these water supplies are [sic] very urgent if irreparable harm is not to be done to the veld of the Reserve between the Fish River and Die Kalk as the population with all their stock are concentrated here resulting in continued overgrazing.'<sup>176</sup>

But the reserve inhabitants now apparently grew more impatient and insistent. While *Kaptein Witbooi* stressed early in 1953 that regardless of recent good rains,<sup>177</sup>

'the plenty of water will dry up again, and then we are without water again, we want to have water, up there on the Kalk, there is good *veld*,'

there was also continued protest articulated against the attitude of the government:

'Why can we not get the boreholes which we always request, why do we always have to talk about the same things?'

Once again the magistrate cut this argument short in a speech which brought out clearly his over-all attitude:

'You do nothing but only talking, ... the whites do their work themselves and you must not only talk here, you must also work.

I hear only today that you ask for water on the West bank of the Fish River and also about gardens which are supposed to be laid out. You complain so much about water, but I see from figures that you have progressed with everything, so things are not so bad for you. I want you not only to talk but also to work, our side is ready, I have still a lot of work to do and shall close now, wish that you'll be all right.'<sup>178</sup>

The magistrate also insisted on the priority of dams which actually were begun on the Kalk a few months after this meeting.<sup>179</sup> His rather rude intervention and unceremoniously

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<sup>175</sup> cf. CNC to Mag Mt, 5.5.1952; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v2; similar, CNC (H.J. du Preez) to Mag Mt, 18.12.1952; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v3.

<sup>176</sup> Principal Agricultural Officer to CNC, received 4.2.1952; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v2.

<sup>177</sup> cf. Berigtes van die Welsynsbeampste: Kransplatz Reserve: Maart 1953, Balt, Kransplatz, 26.3.1953; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v4.

<sup>178</sup> all statements from Notule van Vergadering Gehou deur die Magistraat te Kransplatz 16.3.1953; ib.

<sup>179</sup> Monthly Report of the Welfare Officer: Kransplatz Reserve: Sep 1953, Balt, Kransplatz, 25.9.1953.; ib.

perfunctory closing are revealing: They couple the long-term clichés about Namas being lazy and given to talk rather than action by a reference to empirical signs which rather might be seen as pointing to the opposite, namely the recent 'progress' in terms of stock numbers. By implication, this was used as an argument to bolster the view of the administration that action of the kind demanded by the participants in the meeting was not necessary or at least, not pressing. Of course, *Kaptein Witbooi's* admonishment that a momentary abundance of water and grazing would eventually be followed once more by scarcity and drought, was all too well founded. In this instance, improvidence was certainly on the side of the magistrate. He also revealed ignorance about decades of exchanges about water resources and garden schemes that had variously failed specifically in the Krantzplatz reserve since the early 1930s. Needless to point out that the work on white farms obviously had *not* been all been done by whites 'themselves'.

This meeting was closely followed by the start of activities by 'a whole lot of persons' to open water, some of whom had even procured a boring machine.<sup>180</sup> In July 1953, the Welfare Officer reported:

'Headman D. Witbooi and his people have decided that they will pay themselves for a borehole on the Kalk'.<sup>181</sup>

Two months later, this was reported a success, since

'the well which Josef Witbooi has sunk has given strong water at 24 ft, the water is also reasonably fresh.'<sup>182</sup>

Thus, people started to act on their own initiative and insight in this vital question. But they had to do so in spite of the fact that they were obliged, by official fiat, to pay for precisely those needs they now had to meet by additional efforts. This of course did not stop the administration from going ahead with the proposed dams.

One last instance on water provision may serve to highlight further the abasic approach of the administration. Krantzplatz Reserve headquarters were situated closely to the spot where the valley of the Fish River is cut into the plain, giving a fairly steep slope of some 20 metres in height. At a meeting in early 1952, 'Mrs. D. Witbooi' is recorded to have asked for a water pipe to save old people carrying water up the hill; the magistrate referred this and other requests summarily to the Chief Native Commissioner at Windhoek.<sup>183</sup> This has to be seen against the way the administration had reacted upon a complaint by Welfare Officer Balt some two years earlier. He had pointed out the insufficient water supply for his household needs which forced him to bring water with his car. The problem was in precisely the same area where reserve residents faced the plight of fetching water down from the

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<sup>180</sup> W/O (Festus Balt) to H.J. Allen, 15.9.1952 (official letter head, very unofficial form); NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v2.

<sup>181</sup> Monthly Report of the Welfare Officer: Krantzplatz Reserve: July 1953, Balt, Krantzplatz, 25.7.1953; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v4.

<sup>182</sup> Monthly Report of the Welfare Officer: Krantzplatz Reserve: Sep 1953, Balt, Krantzplatz, 25.9.1953; *ib.*; cf. Extract from Minute of Meeting held by AssCNC Allen at Kp, 11.8.1953; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v2.

<sup>183</sup> W/O Kp to Mag Mt, 12.2.1952; Kwartaalike Vergadering Gehou deur die Distriks Magistraat: 7.2.1952; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v3.

steep rise. Balt now stated, 'The only solution is to drill a borehole here near the house.'<sup>184</sup> The magistrate forwarded this request with the revealing comment that

'due to the isolated situation of this station it seems imperative on grounds of health and nutrition to deliver sufficient water at Headquarters to enable the W/O to produce sufficient vegetables for his family.'

The magistrate, obviously in support of Balt's query, suggested, in addition to Balt's representations, 'a power plant and Reservoir', probably meaning a diesel pump and a tank.<sup>185</sup> This was forwarded by the Chief Native Commissioner almost *verbatim* to the Department of Works within barely one week.<sup>186</sup> The officer sent another urgent letter two weeks later, this time directly to the Works Department.<sup>187</sup> Almost simultaneously, the Chief Native Commissioner, reacting to a telephone call, put further pressure on the department, noting that

'the water of the river ... has become so salt [sic] now that it is unfit for human consumption.'<sup>188</sup>

While the borehole was turned down for geological reasons in this case as well,<sup>189</sup> there was swift action by the Works Department now, authorizing carting of water as an interim measure, and sending a telegramme to a local contractor to repair the existing windmill.<sup>190</sup> From July 1951, the Welfare Officer renewed his complaints.<sup>191</sup> Apparently, some solution along the lines suggested earlier, namely collecting rain water and fitting the necessary tanks and pipes, had been realized.<sup>192</sup> In any case, the Department of Native Affairs acted with much greater readiness and alacrity upon these complaints than upon the difficulties of its charges.

Thus, the plea of the *Kaptein's* wife was treated in a completely different manner, although not only the problem she had raised was the same as that of the Welfare Officer, but it occurred even at the very same place, on Krantzplatz headquarters. Differential treatment can therefore be tested in a *ceteris paribus* situation. In response to Mrs. Witbooi's request, the Chief Native Commissioner advised the magistrate at Mariental simply,

'The application of Mrs. D. Witbooi that pipes should be laid from the water supply of the Welfare Officer cannot be considered favourably, since the supply in question is scarce enough for the Welfare Officer's own needs and the Reserve has no money for these purposes.'<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> W/O Kp to CNC 10.8.1950; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v1.

<sup>185</sup> Mag Mt to CNC, 22.8.1950; ib.

<sup>186</sup> CNC to Dir of Works, 28.8.1950; ib.

<sup>187</sup> W/O Kp (Balt) to Dir of Works, 14.9.1950; ib.

<sup>188</sup> CNC (Bruwer Blignaut) to Dir of Works, 18.9.1950; ib.

<sup>189</sup> CNC to Mag/NC Mt, 25.9.1950; ib.

<sup>190</sup> Dir of Works to Senior Inspector of Works Keetmanshoop, 25.9.1950; ib.

<sup>191</sup> W/O Kp to Mag/NC Mt, 23.7.1951; dto. 29.9.1951; ib. v2.

<sup>192</sup> Report of the Welfare Officer of the Krantzplatz Native Reserve for the Months of January & February 1951. Balt, Krantzplatz, 26.2.1951; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v3; cf. W/O Kp to Mag/NC Mt, 23.7.1951 l.c.

<sup>193</sup> CNC (Allen) to Mag/NC, 13.3.1952; NAN:SWAA A 158/87 v2.

More than a year later, Katrina Witbooi, at a meeting where Assistant CNC Allen was present came back on this complex, to 'ask again that piped water should be brought to us.' She was informed:

'I see it is hard on you to carry the water out of the Fish River, but this would cost a lot of money and there are only £ 300 in the fund, I am sorry I cannot help you.'<sup>194</sup>

In Balt's case, the Department of Native Affairs went out of its way at least to assure that the Welfare Officer could cart water for his requirements and took care that the cost was defrayed from the vote of the Works Department, apparently on account of not having acted satisfactorily in the procurement of water.<sup>195</sup> The matter was presented in a completely different light were the needs and labours of reserve residents were concerned. Here, simply the old logic of reserve finance was invoked, namely the proposition that the reserves should pay their own way and that any additional grants were an expression of good will on the side of the administration, rather than an aspect of joint endeavours of all sections of the populace to develop the country.

One further initiative by the administration should be mentioned in the line of development and improvements: efforts to assert sovereignty in the reserves. Occasionally and especially in the early phases, this took on quite spectacular but necessarily intermittent forms. Almost in the wake of the bombing of the rebellious Bondelswarts the nascent S.A. air force continued its demonstrations in Southern Namibia, obviously with great effect as the report shows that *Kaptein* Johannes Christiaan Goliath

'stated that he was very pleased with the attitude of the Government to fly over his location and greet him by dropping the Union Jack Flag from the Aeroplanes and he is certain that as long as he lives he will always try to keep his people together ...'<sup>196</sup>

Another air demonstration was more warlike, as the the superintendent for Berseba and Tses reported:

'The demonstration of the aireoplanes [sic] at Witboy's Ende (Vaalgras) [sic] was witnessed by Captain Goliath and some members of his Council, Gideon (Herero Headman) and quite a large number of the Tribe and the Veldschoendragers and Damaras. The 12 shells dropped, all exploded within+ yds of the Target.

The immediate aim of this show of force was to induce the 'Hereros', which designated the Vaalgras group, to have their stock branded and thus conform to regulations, and the superintendent reported instant success.<sup>197</sup>

Eventually, the administration came to think of more lasting and economic ways of showing its presence and legitimacy also in the form of symbols. In 1937, a circular advised native commissioners, viz., magistrates that

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<sup>194</sup> Extract from Minute of Meeting held by AssCNC Allen at Kp, 11.8.1953; ib.

<sup>195</sup> cf. CNC (Bruwer Blignaut) to Seniorrekenmester, 14.11.1950; ActCNC (Eedes) to Senior Accountant, 29.6.1951; ib.

<sup>196</sup> Sgt Homan to Mag Gib 5.7.1922; NAN:SWAA A 396/8.

<sup>197</sup> Monthly Report of Sup (H.N. van der Made) April 1925; NAN:SWAA A 217/1 v2.



'with a view to impressing on the natives in the Reserves Union Sovereignty in the Territory, His Honour the Administrator instructs that the Union National flag must be hoisted daily in the Reserves, and the Welfare Officer should be instructed accordingly.'<sup>198</sup>

In Mariental, the magistrate responded by asking for the necessary material. This was to be sent to the superintendent, who was to erect the flagstaff. The magistrate did not miss the important point: 'Kindly also supply him with a Union flag.'<sup>199</sup> The reply was speedy. Within a mere six days the magistrate was told:

'I beg to inform you that the usual regulation flagstaff will be supplied by the Works Department at an approximate cost of £ 11.0.0. The cost will be debited against the Gibeon Native Reserve fund.'<sup>200</sup>

A year later, the central administration voiced second thoughts about the 'cost involved' in supplying an 'official flagstaff'. This, another circular noted, would not be

'a proper charge against the Trust Fund. It is, however, politic that the Union flag should be flown in the Reserve.'

The circular called for 'local arrangements' at lower costs, but the administration did not relinquish control and requested information on 'the class of staff that would be supplied'.<sup>201</sup> A month later, a reminder admonished the magistrate in Mariental, 'please expedite'.<sup>202</sup> Meanwhile, the teacher at the Rehnish Mission industrial school at Krantzplatz, Fritz Gerdes who had acted as a kind of jack-of-all-trades in technical matters on the reserve before and also become the reserve superintendent offered to erect a 30' high staff at a cost of £ 7.10.<sup>203</sup> The magistrate reported this in a recommending letter back to Windhoek.<sup>204</sup> Eventually, flagstaffs for Ovitoto, Bondels, Krantzplatz and Waterberg East reserves were paid for out of the Works Vote.<sup>205</sup> For reasons not stated, the Assistant Secretary marginalized on the relevant letter of the magistrate of Keetmanshoop that Berseba and Soromas reserves did in fact not need a flagpole, while on the other hand, Tses had been overlooked.<sup>206</sup> There, a flagstaff, an office and a lavatory were supplied eventually.<sup>207</sup> A possible explanation for these turns may be that among the three reserves mentioned, only Tses had a resident superintendent at this time. Therefore, it was only at his headquarters and permanent lodgings that a show of sovereignty seemed necessary. Because of his continued presence, he had, as a matter of course, also to be supplied with certain amenities which, by implication, were not considered as requisite in the absence of a white official.

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<sup>198</sup> ActCNC A.H.Louw to NC Mt (circular, mimeo), 15.6.1937; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v2.

<sup>199</sup> Mag Mt to CNC, 3.7.1937; ib.

<sup>200</sup> ActCNC (H.J.Allen) to NC Mt/Dir of Works, 9.7.1937; ib.

<sup>201</sup> ActCNC (L. Trollope), mimeo to Mag.s 8.7.1938; ib.

<sup>202</sup> SecSWA to Mag Mt, 11.8.1938; ib.

<sup>203</sup> Sup Kp (Gerdes) to Mag Mt, 26.7.1938; ib.

<sup>204</sup> cf. Mag Mt to CNC, 11.8.1938; ib.

<sup>205</sup> Adm/CNC to Dir of Works 27.9.1938; NAN:SWAA A 50/72/1 v1.

<sup>206</sup> NC Kh to CNC, 27.9.1938; ib.

<sup>207</sup> CNC to Dir Works, 20.10.1938; ib.

This episode, while not touching on vital questions such as the issues of stock improvement and in particular water, once more sums up central features in administrative behaviour vis-à-vis the reserves: centralism, intermittent interest documented by the year-long interval, and the attempt to devolve costs on-to reserve funds even though in this case, the intended show of sovereignty had in reality nothing to do with development or improvement, but rather could be seen in a trajectory leading towards the long-term aim of successive South African governments, to incorporate Namibia for good.

## 8. Towards the homeland strategy

By *fiat* of the South African government, the administration of 'native affairs' was transferred, from the date of 1 April 1955, from the jurisdiction of the SWA Administration to that of the central Native Affairs Department, shortly to be renamed Bantu Affairs, in Pretoria.<sup>208</sup> The original idea for the transfer had been motivated by the fact that Namibian *whites* had been given representation in the Union Parliament. This supposedly necessitated a closer linkage between the administration of Namibia and the Union government.<sup>209</sup> The main and obvious objective of this transfer was to bring 'native' policy in Namibia more into line with the strategy that was evolving in South Africa in the creation of bantustans, later to be renamed as 'homelands'. This emerges quite clearly from the address the Minister of Native Affairs directed to 'the Natives living in South West Africa' on occasion of the transfer. While stressing the continuity of administration, the minister also stated:

'Under the new dispensation will it be possible to take advantage for South West Africa out of the plans which have been propagated in the die Union and been approved for its natives ...'<sup>210</sup>

This foreshadowed rather obviously the application of homeland strategies then just being hammered out in South Africa also to Namibia. In the same context, the justification strategies of the colonial power were given a new turn. Thus, the administration argued within the framework of its defence against criticism from the Permanent Mandates Commission 20 years earlier, but now the reserves were presented not as having to pay their way by themselves, but rather, as being subsidized out of general revenue:

'... the Natives in the tribal areas pay no taxes whatsoever, and those in the Police Zone virtually no taxes, to the Central Treasury from which funds are provided not merely for services amongst them, such as for law and order, but also for social services, such as health and education, as well as for economic development of their areas in supplementation of any fund raised in those areas by way of grazing fees or levies etc. ...'

The administration pointed to grants of £ 350,000 that had accrued to the reserves since the War, and a pledge of £ 50,000 p.a. for 10 years from 1.4.1955. At the same time, it

<sup>208</sup> see Act 56/1954, OG 1843, 30.6.1954.

<sup>209</sup> Kabinetmemorandum, handwritten exposé dated 25.11.1951; SAB:TES 2946 F 11/293.

<sup>210</sup> quoted in: Notes on Points Mentioned in the Summary of the Report on the Committee on South West Africa (1956) Prepared by the Department of External Affairs and on Some Points in the Report not Mentioned in the Summary (covering letter to Office of the Adm, 12.9.1956, the author was SecSWA Nesor); NAN:SWAA 73/27/1 v2.

made a point of refuting 'false expectations' that supposedly had been raised by the Committee on South West Africa which had reported to the U.N. General Assembly<sup>211</sup> and had directed scathing criticism at the mandatory power for not living up to the obligations implicit in the mandate.<sup>212</sup>

By insisting on the principle of racial segregation, brought out graphically in juxtaposing the 'white taxpayer' to the (non-taxpaying) 'native', it was thus attempted to brave U.N. and other international criticism by an inherently racist stance, couched in a language of magnanimity. But the main point was a rejection of the idea of a unitary constituency made up of all Namibians. Instead, the administration as well as the ruling party and the government of South Africa insisted on the existence of several discrete constituencies which were supposed to be responsible in the first place only for themselves, whereas any redistribution to make up for the gross disparities was motivated, not by civic equity or solidarity nor by common heritage in the natural resources of the country, but by a concept of charity, implicitly and often even explicitly juxtaposing industrious and efficient whites to improvident and for the most time lazy Africans. This attitude and reading of the working principle of Namibia's public finance under South African rule was a direct outflow of the principle of segregation which had been established and cemented from the first stages of military occupation and been kept up right down to the homeland dispensation and the concomitant attempts to force a unilateral independence solution in defiance of international law and opinion.

While there is a clear line of continuity in terms of finance leading from reserve to homeland, the position is different regarding the ascribed ethnic identities of the reserves. As has been shown, at their inception the native reserves, in particular in southern Namibia, had not been allocated specifically to any tribal or ethnic group, even though the headmen were recruited from among the predominant group in any given reserve. The old tribal lands, explicitly belonging to the Berseba and Bondels tribes formed an obstacle to the carrying through of an over-all policy which became more clearly apparent from the start in the newly formed reserves of Krantzplatz, Tses and also in the small reserve of Neuhoef. Here people lived together who were described as Namas, Damaras and Hereros with a smattering of Couloureds. Up to the late 1940s, their ethnic identity had largely been open to circumstantial definition, and thus 'residents could adopt a flexible attitude' (Silvester 1993, p. 174). Tangible change set in with the introduction of a system of tribal trust funds. At first, this was to be instituted for Hereros, later to be followed by one each for Namas, Damaras and 'Miscellaneous'.<sup>213</sup> The divisive potential of this dispensation emerges vividly from a scene in the yearly tribal meeting in Berseba, where the Chief Native Commissioner insisted that under this plan, Hereros, even though living in Berseba would be liable to the levy for the Herero tribal fund, whereas Namas should pay into the Nama fund and Damaras into the Damara fund, thus giving 'each tribe the benefit of its own exchequer'. Of course, this reciprocated the idea of 'whites' and 'natives' each paying their own way separately. At the time, this was countered by headman Edward Isaak who insisted: "We are a Nama reserve and those who have been born here are Namas."<sup>214</sup> By implication, this rejoinder clearly confronted the Apartheid government's ethnicist concepts with a concept of collective identity based on territoriality and relationships formed through long-term living together for generations under specific rules and traditional leaders.

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<sup>211</sup> Notes on Points Mentioned ..., I.c.

<sup>212</sup> Report of the Committee on South West Africa to the General Assembly (1956); ib.

<sup>213</sup> cf. Reply of the Government of South Africa ..., I.c., question 14.

<sup>214</sup> Jaarlikse Berseba-Stamvergadering, 23.5.1956; NAN:BAC HN 1/15/4/7.



But the matter was more complicated. In the late 1940s, the administration took the initiative to call tribal meetings. As subsequent developments demonstrated, this was more than a mere attempt 'to resurrect a "Nama" tribe from an empty coffin' (Silvester 1993, p. 176). There had been a pointedly 'Nama' cultural initiative shortly before the tribal meetings got under way,<sup>215</sup> and there was response among local leaders who regularly attended these meetings throughout the 1950s. In particular, these leaders put up a stiff resistance when it emerged that the government, inadvertently or not, had lumped them into the designation of 'Bantu'. They insisted vociferously on being called 'Namas'.<sup>216</sup> The Nama tribal meetings themselves were eventually discontinued because the administration saw them as arenas for the airing of common grievances and the formation of protest.<sup>217</sup> This would suggest that at least there had been a body in the coffin, and moreover, that the body was fairly alive and kicking though not quite in the way the colonial power would have it. The main difference would be that according to circumstantial evidence, these utterings did not display the exclusionary tendency inherent in the splitting up of the various groups which was obvious in the case of the trust funds.

Such a tendency was quite apparent in the earlier ways of treating diversity within the reserves. This reveals a contradictory picture: there had been the instance of Hereros eventually pushed out of the crowded Krantzplatz reserve in 1940s, and disputes on the admission of people termed Coloureds where the administration and the traditional groups found themselves at first sight, on shifting ground, interchangeably advocating and opposing admission. The confusion is resolved when the problem is referred to the question of jurisdiction over admission rather than to supposed diversity.<sup>218</sup> A similar picture emerges with reference to leadership. From the mid-1930s, there had always been three headmen appointed in Tses Reserve, one each for Hereros, Namas and Damaras;<sup>219</sup> the

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<sup>215</sup> cf. NAN:SWAA A 50/227.

<sup>216</sup> Hoofbantoesakekomisaris (v.d.Watt) to Distrikskommandant, S.A.Polisie, Keetmanshoop, 26.10.1960; NAN:BAC HN 1/15/5/3 v3.

<sup>217</sup> Acting Chief Bantu Affairs Commissioner (Gerber) to Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development, confidential, undated (1963); NAN:BAC: HN 1/15/6/27.

<sup>218</sup> see above and cf. for instances of disputes over Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board & Residents held at Kranzplatz on Monday, 23.2.1931; Minutes of Meeting of the Gibeon Native Reserve Board and Residents held in the School Room at Kranzplatz at 4.30 p.m. on 1.4.1931; NAN:SWAA A 158/6 v1; Sup Kp to Mag Mt, 21.2.1938; Mag Mt to CNC, 22.2.1938; Richard Alcock to CNC, 31.7.1942; W/O Kp (Gerdes) to Mag Mt, 17.8.1942; CNC (Allen) to Richard Alcock, 2.9.1942; ib., v2; Sup Kp (Rossouw) to NC Mt, 6.10.1948; ib., v3; Notule van Jaarvergadering Gehou op Berseba op die 16de Augustus '40, stamped Mag Kh, 19.8.1940; NAN:SWAA A 158/51/8; Location Sup Kh to Mag Kh, 17.2.1949; Mag Kh to CNC, 18.2.1949; CNC to Mag/NC Kh, 8.3.1949; Mag Kh to CNC, 24.6.1949; Bers Raad to W/O (Burger) 17.10.1950; W/O Bers (Burger) to Mag Kh, 2.11.1950; SecSWA (Neser) to Adm., 23.11.1950; CNC to Mag/NC Kh, 4.12.1950; Piet Matthys to Mag Kh, 8.12.1950; W/O Bers to Mag/NC Kh, 27.2.1951; Mag Kh to CNC, 5.3.1951; CNC to Mag/NC, Kh, 12.3.1951; all on NAN:SWAA A 217/1 v3. On the Herero exodus from Krantzplatz, see Monthly Report of the Superintendent of the Gibeon Native Reserve in the district of Gibeon for the month of May 1940 (Gerdes); Kranzplatz, 27.5.1940; dto, July 1940, stamped Mt, 9.8.1940; SWAA A 158/6 v2; and cf. Silvester 1993, pp. 170ff.

<sup>219</sup> see W/O Tses & Berseba to NC Kh, 6.1.1937 (recte: 1938): Return of Native Affairs Staff: Tses Reserve (NAN:SWAA A 158/53 v1), listing Jan Appolos, Alfeus Karea, and Hans Jager as headmen, appointed in 1928, 1935 and 1936 respectively; in the 1920s, Jan Appolos had been sole headman, first of Vaalgras and then of Tses Reserve see Petition of Vaalgras people 30.10.1924; Mag Kh to SecSWA, 2.1.25; all on NAN:SWAA 217/1 v2.



same occurred for a brief period in Krantzplatz Reserve when a Damara headman was installed.<sup>220</sup> In Tses, the three tribes living in the reserve were equally represented on the reserve board<sup>221</sup> delegates were chosen 'to represent the inhabitants of the reserve' at the Herero tribal meeting,<sup>222</sup> but there were also delegates from this reserve regularly at the Nama meetings.<sup>223</sup> The position was stated particularly clearly with respect to Berseba councillor Gerhard Groeneveld who was clasified as 'coloured', in connection with his proposed delegation to the Nama tribal meeting in 1951:

'Our magistrate has said now that the meeting at Keetmanshoop is for us Namas only, but we consist of many tribes, such as for example Gerhard Groeneveld who was borne here and he is a Coloured. He is one of us and we asked the magistrate that we send Groeneveld in place of Johannes Goliath, who is very ill now.'<sup>224</sup>

With the formation of the homeland strategy, such seemingly disorderly conditions became targeted for reform. The Odendaal Plan of 1964 provided a blueprint to implement a development policy along Apartheid lines in Namibia. This highlighted the concept of separate development which formed a central stance of the Apartheid system. In keeping with this general outlook, the report rejected the idea of 'one central authority with all groups represented herein' and advised that

'as far as possible a homeland must be created for each population group on which it alone would have residential, political and language rights to the exclusion of other population goups, so that each group would be able to develop towards self-determination without any other group dominating or being dominated by another.' (RoSA 1964, § 190).

Of course, this echoed and radicalized the attitude the administration and South African government had displayed in meeting the criticism they incurred in the League of Nations framework some 30 years earlier. The decisive step further was motivated by a reference to the original mandate's stipulation

'that underdeveloped communities must eventually be given self-determination and that therefore greater governing powers must be given to the local non-white groups'

and also by the claim that 'the said groups' wished 'to rule themselves in their own areas' (ib., § 184). In the same light, the report presented the policy followed by the South African government 'since accepting responsibility for the Territory and its inhabitants' in particular towards 'the variety of political and economic communities':

'The recognition of these individual communities and the provision of separate home areas for the various population groups, as far as practicable, meant that

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<sup>220</sup> Notule van Vergadering Gehou op 8 Augustus 1949 te Krantzplatz; NAN:SWAA A 158/98 v1.

<sup>221</sup> see NAN:SWAA A 50/188/10 v1, subfile Ile Reserve Boards, return for Tses.

<sup>222</sup> W/O Tses to Mag/NC Kh, 6.11.1954; NAN:SWAA A 50/223/1 v5.

<sup>223</sup> see NAN:SWAA A 50/238 and BAC HN 1/15/5/3 *passim*.

<sup>224</sup> Notule van Kwartaalikse Vergadering gehou te Berseba deur die Magistraat op 16 November 1951, intervention by Lukas Frederik; NAN:SWAA A 217/24 v2; the magistrate promised to ask the CNC for approval.

recognition of the political institutions of these communities as they functioned inevitably had to follow.' (ib., § 258)

This did not preclude that the commission, in its subsequent account of reserve legislation, took note of the 'disintegration of the population groups in the Southern Sector'. Therefore,

'a process had to be started anew for the development and expansion of those forms of government in the home areas' (ib., § 259).

From the 1920s onwards, South African reserve policy in Namibia was thus presented as one of providing 'homes' and reconstructing corresponding institutions, quite contrary to the historic record which clearly points to the centrality of the labour question and also to the ambiguities of residential rights in and jurisdiction over the reserves, no re-named as 'home areas'. In this view, the latter took on a far more 'ethnically' defined profile than had actually been the case. At the same time, the reserve administrative institutions were presented as 'governing bodies' (ib., § 267), clearly magnifying the scope 'headmen' had in fact been granted by the administration in controlling and managing reserve affairs. Presenting matters in this light, the commission was able to present its recommendations in the light of continuity. It called for

'the continued existence of a home area for each individual population group as the inalienable area of that indigenous group' (ib., § 293).

For the smaller Southern reserves which 'cannot possibly continue to exist as separate self-governing homelands' the commission proposed either integration 'with the nearest homeland of their own population group' or removal 'to the enlarged homeland of their own population group', based on persuasion and compensation. Under these premises, the definition of 'population groups' took on overriding importance. Seemingly in a rather casual fashion the commission recommended

'that there should be a permanent and stable homeland for each of the various population groups such as (!) the Basters, Damara, Nama, Herero, Tswana, Bushmen, Ovambo, Okavango, Kaokovelders, East Caprivians and Whites' (ib., § 296).

Of these groups, some such as the 'Kaokovelders' were defined merely by having been included into colonial administrative units (cf. e.g. Bollig 1997, pp. 69-78). As far as southern Namibia was concerned, the list included the three groupings for whom annual tribal meetings had been organised over the one-and-a-half decades preceding the report, i.e., Nama, Damara and Herero. It was these the report stated to

'have reached a stage of development where a larger measure of self-government and judicial administration can be entrusted to them in their respective homelands' (RoSA 1964, § 296).

In thus basing its recommendations, the report skipped over a number of obvious problems. To begin with, the administration had just discontinued the annual tribal meetings for Namas since they were evaluated as a forum for protest. In contradistinction to the impression conveyed in the text, the report itself, when listing the various 'home areas' existing in 1962 noted their predominantly mixed occupation, which in the South

encompassed, besides Nama, variously Damara, Herero and also Coloureds. The only exception in this region was the small Soromas reserve in the vicinity of Bethanië (see *ib.*, § 252). Such observations were reiterated later by officials concerned with the implementation of the plan.<sup>225</sup> The Odendaal recommendations thus served an ulterior objective, the creation of homelands in Namibia as a core feature of the Apartheid agenda. The particulars of 'Namaland' as proposed by the Odendaal plan contained further contradictions. The plan called for major revisions in land distribution. On the one hand, 165 white-owned farms were to be bought from government funds and added to the four reserves of Berseba, Tses, Krantzplatz and Soromas which were to form the core of the new homeland. In addition, Gibeon town and townlands and the farm Itzawisis, all forming government land at the time, were to be included (see *ib.*, §§ 393-395). The reserves of Bondelswarts, Warmbad and Neuhof were considered as 'small areas' and not to be included into the future 'homeland', since they were deemed remote and overgrazed; the inhabitants were to be 'persuaded in their own interests to move to Namaland' and the old reserves be turned into government land (*ib.*, §§ 396, 397, 411). This meant that one of the oldest and largest reserves in southern Namibia, that of the Bondelswarts measuring just below 175,000 ha, as well as the Bondels traditional capital of Warmbad nearby, were to be vacated by the resident Nama people. The commission did not mention the fact that various Nama groups would still be living outside the proposed homeland, such as the Red Nation in Hoachanas, the Kuiseb and Sesfontein Topnaars and the Swartboois in Franzfontein. All these instances were to cause difficulty within the framework of the homeland dispensation during the two decades of refining and implementing the Odendaal Plan. In fact, Hoachanas was a hot issue even at the time of reporting. The report's silence would lend evidence to the view that difficulties were rather camouflaged than addressed. Be that as it may, these inconsistencies are clear evidence that the idea of ethnically homogeneous and territorially continuous 'homelands' militated against the reality of Namibia's past and present which had seen plenty of intermingling and migration to and from since the early 19th century at least. At the same time, the idea of 'consolidation' obviously had wide currency amongst administration officials; thus, the incumbent Chief Native Commissioner had pointed out that recurrent complaints about the 'smallness' of reserves were used as a pretext

'to stress that ... they [i.e., reserve residents and leaders] should be reasonable and ask the government to shift them to an area which borders one of the large reserves',

i.e., either Berseba or Tses.<sup>226</sup> The objective of straightening out the ethnic map of Namibia and even of creating small ethnically defined states must have been all the more important in the commission's minds as they envisaged a separate citizenship 'as soon as practicable' as well as 'gradual development towards political independence' (*ib.*, § 404, 416) of their brain children. Such a goal, which of course was superseded later on by the three tier Turnhalle dispensation, could only be reached by effecting sweeping removals, including not only the vacating of deproclaimed reserves but also the eviction of people who happened to reside in the 'wrong' reserve turned over to the homeland. Thus, officials later would concede that while there would be no question to look for 'pure Namas', still

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<sup>225</sup> cf. H.M.S. Ferreira, Bantoesakekommissaris to Kommissaris-Generaal, Oshakati Ovamboland, 1.12.1967: Streeksbeplanning: Namaland; SAB:KGO N2/10/3/2.

<sup>226</sup> CNC (Allen) to Secretary for Native Affairs, 18.6.1956; NAN:BAC HN 1/15/2 deel 3.



Damara, Herero and also Coloured farmers weighed heavily on the carrying capacity and should be moved out.<sup>227</sup>

Finally, the political set-up of Namaland as envisaged in the Odendaal Plan but which in fact was never implemented in this form, deserves brief notice. The proposed Legislative Council was to be formed by representatives of the existing reserves, with only 'the chief of Krantzplatz (Gibeon) and councillors *ex officio*' while Berseba and Tses were given three seats each, Soromas one, and the three reserves which the commission recommended to close given temporary representation. There was a undetermined number of elected members, 'as the Council of the chief and councillors may determine' (ib., § 398). Berseba, Tses and 'Krantzplatz (Gibeon) (*including land added*)' were to be given local authorities (ib., § 402; emphasis added). These propositions were modified later in quite significant ways reflecting the inherent contradictions of the commission's proposals and the homeland strategy in general. One particularly important feature not contained in the Odendaal plan was the provision of separate tribal councils for groups that were defined accordingly and also of separate areas allocated to such groups.

Despite its inconsistencies, the Namaland project was not completely without foundation or precedent. As far as cultural initiatives by leading Nama or the experience with the annual meetings were concerned, these were rather problematic from the viewpoint of the colonial power. In a way, the Namaland project also took up even older plans stemming from the early 1920s and envisaging to use the Tses Reserve for the resettlement of groups then living outside proclaimed reserves, which comprised, at that time, mainly the Witboois and the Red Nation. This approach of concentrating Nama groups quite irrespectively of their ancestral lands from which they were to be uprooted if need be, was replicated now, on a much grander scale. The resettlement scheme which was finalized during the early 1970s encompassed the Bondelswarts, the Red Nation, the Simon Koper group living around Goachas, the Topnaars living at the mouth of the Kuiseb, and the inhabitants of Neuhof Reserve who were given the ethnic epithet of 'Neuhofs' for the occasion.<sup>228</sup> According to the planning as it evolved during the years after the Odendaal Commission had reported, all of these were to be resettled on the 'Odendaal farms' to the West, South and East of Gibeon which formed the main chunk of land acquired by the government in the course of implementing the Namaland scheme. The groups mentioned were all to be allocated pieces of land on a tribal basis. The planners strove to take cognizance of historical proximity in creating new neighbourhoods between resettled tribes or they claimed to take into account the (Kuiseb) Topnaar tradition as a 'river people' by earmarking the area around the confluence of the Fish and Lower Rivers for their eventual settlement.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> see Notule van Vergadering van Hoofmanne en Raadslede van Namaland, die Sekretaris KRN en die Streekvertegenwoordiger van die Departement in Windhoek en ander beampste gehou te Gibeon op 5. 12.1973 (intervention by secretary Mills); regional representative Gibello to secretary, 14.1.1974; KAB:KUS B 24/4/D58 deel II; Gibello also stressed that the idea of having strangers in leading positions was foreign to Namas, quoting Budack, who stresses the opposite for recent times (see 1972, p. 269).

<sup>228</sup> Memo to Secretary [CR] 18.2.1971; SecCR (Strydom) to S/V, 17.8.73; KAB:KUS B 23/2/D57.

<sup>229</sup> Memo 18.2.1971, l.c.



## 9. The Namaland Dispensation in action

Eventually, this technocratic plan to create a neatly set-out series of petty tribal realms with some quaint allusion to a past which would be lost beyond any hope of recovery by the very act of resettlement, did not materialize. In terms of resettlement effected, the realization of the Namaland plan fell far short of the scope envisaged. Only a part of the Bondelswarts actually did move under heavy pressure, mainly to the area south of Gibeon; a number of them returned a few years later, especially after their old reserve had been re-proclaimed and made part of Namaland in 1978.<sup>230</sup> Even this amount of movement led that, in the eyes of a Catholic mission source, to a situation where 'Gibeon was being overcrowded' at the close of the 1960s (Wehr 1994, p. 398). The plans for other large-scale removals had to be shelved eventually. Hoachanas was recognized as the home of the Red Nation after a prolonged conflict that had dragged on for more than half a century in 1975.<sup>231</sup> The Kuiseb Topnaars also remained in their old abodes. The inhabitants of Neuhof were resettled in the area toward the West of Gibeon, but the attempt to set them up as a separate tribal group met stiff and successful resistance by the Witbooi leadership who claimed jurisdiction both over the farms on which the reserve inhabitants were resettled and over the old reserve as well.<sup>232</sup> For the latter, it was argued that this had been the area where the old *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi had kept his horses safeguarded during the dangerous season. Only the Simon Koper group was established as part of the homeland dispensation, cutting off an area which had been allotted to the Witboois in the original set-up.<sup>233</sup>

One particularly conflict-ridden provision emerged only during the preparatory stages of the actual creation of the homeland. It concerned the provisions made in the Namaland Proclamation<sup>234</sup> for the lowest tier of administration. The question of local administration had been addressed in the Odendaal Plan only in the form of passing reference to the existing reserve headmen. Of course, the new provisions were motivated by the grand design of unilateral independence which was being hammered out by the Turnhalle conference at the same time (cf. Gottschalk 1987, p. 30) and which also implied that the original idea of creating an 'independent' state was quietly dropped.<sup>235</sup> A central feature of the Turnhalle dispensation which was implemented after 1975 was the three-tier constitutional and administrative structure, comprising a central government, ethnic authorities and local authorities which in this case were defined as tribal councils. At the same time, they responded to developments that had taken place during the initial stages of the implementation of the Odendaal Plan. There had been a measure of uncertainty in the administration which came out in the idea to "tie together" some of the smaller groups 'under a central council', 'now they are settled near each other'. The council was to be

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<sup>230</sup> see extensive correspondence on NAN: CRN 26/2/1/3; departmental memo to AG, 7/8/78 and further materials on NAN: AGA AG 18/1/1 v1; SecCRN (Mills) to SecPublic Commission, 1.10.1979; NAN:AGA AG 18/1, v8.

<sup>231</sup> *Windhoek Advertiser*, 15.3.1975.

<sup>232</sup> see Stamvergadering Gibeon 25.11.1974; Meeting between Mills and Headmen and Councillors of Namaland, Kh, 29.7.75; Meeting OS(L) with Hendrik Witbooi and Stephanus Group, 22.9.75; Vergadering gehou te Uibis op 16 Augustus 1975; KAB: KUS B 24/4/D58 deel II; SecCRN (Kotze) to NSK, 19.9.77; *ib.*, deel III; and see below chpt 2.

<sup>233</sup> Government Notices AG 1/1978, AG 2/1978, OGE No 3686 A.

<sup>234</sup> Proclamation (RSA) 160/1975, RSA Government Gazette No 4785 (11 July 1975).

<sup>235</sup> cf. SecCRN (J.H.T Mills) to NSK, 27.1.76; KAB:KUS B 24/4/D58 deel III.

made up of the respective headmen.<sup>236</sup> This testifies to the basically technocratic approach which of course tended to create manageable population units. But this was superseded above all by political concerns, which came to the fore in particular, with the appointment of a separate, acting headman for the part of the Bondelswarts who had moved into the area south of Gibeon where they settled on farms acquired for the consolidation of Namaland.<sup>237</sup> The recognition of the appointee, also against the protest of the Witbooi *Kaptein* was motivated by the consideration that the Bondelswarts were at the time 'the only Nama group which is well disposed towards government policy'.<sup>238</sup> With this appointment alone, the idea of the Odendaal Plan to construct the Nama Council more or less on the basis of the reserve institutions already existing in the proposed homeland had been made obsolete.

But the Namaland Proclamation went considerably further. It changed, at least in appearance, the content of the office of headman. It vested the 'chief or headman' with a rather impressive array of powers, at least compared to the position of the former lowly position the reserve headmen had found themselves in. The absence of some of the powers that were now conceded had figured high on the lists of grievances submitted annually at the Nama Tribal Meetings for more than a decade. Thus, under section 19, 20 34 of the Namaland Proclamation, besides the duties carried over from the reserve structures, ranging from various 'improvements' to the destruction of vermin and prevention of cruelty to animals, the tribal authorities and headmen in particular were given powers to raise levies, and specifically the headmen were given a range of powers in the field of discipline and legal proceedings which must have looked impressive in comparison to the lowly station accorded to the reserve headmen previously. In maintaining law and order, they were given, i.a. 'the power to arrest', the right to control entry 'into his area', the duty to cause the dispersal of 'any riotous or unlawful gathering', and in particular the power to 'try any case where the offence is an offence according to tribal laws, tribal customs or tribal resolutions', except when a 'White person' was involved.<sup>239</sup> Basically, these 'Chief's or Headman's Courts', under section 35 of the proclamation, were given the right to impose fines of up to R 20 and also to inflict corporal punishment on persons under 25 years of age, subject of appeal to a magistrate. Specifically this latter right had been requested for a long time as an important element to resuscitate the shattered authority of the Nama traditional leadership. From the record it can be seen that the administration moved consciously into linking separate lands and funds for each 'tribe' with an enhanced status for 'headmen'. Thus, departmental secretary Mills, one of the officials most active in promoting the Namaland plan, stressed in a preparatory discussion the wish of headmen better to be able to control their people which would be made easier by each tribe having land of its own, a lawful council, as well as a tribal fund.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> SecCR (D.J.Bosman) to Minister van Kleurlingsake, 18.11.71; KAB:KUS B 24/3/D58/1.

<sup>237</sup> see, i.a., Memo signed Landdros/BSK H.M.S. Ferreira/SeniorLB D G Booh(?)sen: Herwinning en Nedersetting van Hatzium groep plase: Namaland 16-10-1967; OS(L) to Sec 18.2.71; KAB:KUS B 23/2/D58.

<sup>238</sup> Sekretaris van Veiligheidsinligting (D.J.D. Jacobs) to SecCR, 13.6.73 (vertroulik); KAB:KUS B 24/3/D58/1 .

<sup>239</sup> Proclamation (RSA) 160/1975, Sect. 34 (1) (b), (f), (g vi), (h); cf. Sect. 17.

<sup>240</sup> Notule van Vergadering van Hoofmanne en Raadslede van Namaland, die Sekretaris KRN en die Streekvertegenwoordiger van die Departement in Windhoek en ander beampte gehou te Gibeon op 5. 12.1973; there were serious misgivings about the official promises by several participants such

In appearance, then, the Namaland dispensation had something on offer for traditional leaders and their communities. This comprised enhanced rights to control land and enforce discipline as well as the hope to recuperate some of the land lost. Control and appointment by the minister subaltern position not changed in essence. But while holding out the carrot of increased powers to the Nama leaders, the Namaland Proclamation, upon closer inspection, did little in reality to enhance their position. Every power conferred was checked by a provision of review by a higher authority, usually the Minister of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Affairs or in legal matters the magistrate of the area concerned. The duties of the 'chiefs and headmen' to report on a great number of matters to their superiors, which confirmed their old position as subordinate government servants. And the Minister had the right to either 'confirm' appointments on which tribal authorities had decided or make them ineffective, and to appoint 'any Nama', 'after consultation with the tribal authority or chief or headman concerned', 'if he deems it to be in the public interest', i.e., practically at the discretion of the Minister. The same applied for vacancies of more than three months.<sup>241</sup> These provisions all took on acumen when traditional communities refused to comply and did not form the required institutions. In terms of the Namaland Proclamation, such groups could, at as formal level at least easily be disenfranchised, without a legal chance of appeal against decisions by the ministry, the Namaraad or later on, the Nama Legislative Assembly and their executive bodies.

A further important consequence of the setting-up of the homeland consisted in the fact that the plan not only envisaged comparatively large-scale removals *into* the proposed homeland, but by implication of its ethnic set-up also *out* of it. Section 45 of the Namaland Proclamation of 1975 conferred authority upon the Nama Commissioner, i.e. the regional representative of the Department of Coloured, Rehoboth and Nama Affairs,

'after consultation with the tribal authority or the Nama Council, and with the approval of the Minister, to order a person who is not a Nama or a lawful inhabitant of Namaland to leave Namaland with the members of his household ... or to settle at a specified place in Namaland.'

The soft wording of this provision referred to the obvious difficulties in determining in a legally sound way who was supposed to 'be' a Nama. At the same time, it opened the doors wide for administrative licence. This applied, in particular, to persons (re)classified as Damaras and Hereros as well as Coloureds, who for generations had been living in the region.

The institutional framework provided by the proclamation was complemented by declaring the central places of Namaland separate villages or towns (*dorpe*). In early plans, they were envisaged as regional 'growth points' where around a tribal administration might be grouped 'school, clinic and trading centre for the tribe', which at that early time was designated as a 'Bantodorp' by an official who had to be reminded that this would not be well received by 'the inhabitants of the South of Southwest' who would prefer 'Namadorp'.<sup>242</sup> The inherent ambiguity between conceptualizing such centres as tribal ones

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as councillor Tseitseimau from Berseba, councillor Herero from Soromas and headman Goliath from Berseba; KAB:KUS B 24/4/D58 deel II.

<sup>241</sup> Proclamation (RSA) 160/195, Sect. 33; cf. Sect. 34.

<sup>242</sup> H.M.S. Ferreira, Bantoesakekommissaris to Kommissaris-Generaal, Oshakati Ovamboland, 1.12.1967: Streeksbeplanning: Namaland, l.c.



and giving them regional functions while at the same time re-settling diverse tribal groups were placed under village management boards (*dorpbesture*). There were eventually four of these: Berseba, Gibeon, Kosis near Bethanië and Tses. Plans for the erection of a capital which was proposed first at Gibeon and later, at a new site near Brukkaros railway station never materialized and the 'Administration for Namas' resided, till the termination of its existence in Keetmanshoop, outside the homeland. Under section 23 of the proclamation, 'every tribal authority within the area of the village management board' was given two seats on the *dorpbestuur*, in addition to a number of elective seats to be determined by the Minister. The *dorpbestuur* was given much the same rights in its 'area' as the tribal authorities, but again, according to section 24 of the proclamation, it was to act

'subject to the conditions determined by the Minister after consultation with the tribal authority concerned'.

Its competences were largely concerned with the control and regulation of building, sanitation and other amenities, control of persons moving in and out, and finally, sales licences. The *dorpbestuur* thus controlled some of the centrally needed as well as coveted resources. Its ambiguous set-up as a partly elective body while partly linked to the tribal authorities, partly an independent body of local government, partly again answerable or even dependent on adjacent tribal authorities proved to be quite effective for some time as a lever used by the authorities to try and bring recalcitrant groups into line. As far as traditional communities refused to reorganize their leading bodies as tribal authorities in accordance with the Namaland Proclamation, they could not be represented on the *dorpbestuur* and thus, were denied a voice in the running of the central places. In the case of Berseba, this became a further point of conflict between the two contending sections. Gibeon had been envisaged by administration officials at a rather early stage of the implementation of the Odendaal Plan as 'a neutral area',<sup>243</sup> serving as a centre for a whole array of tribal groups which, except for the Witboois, were supposed to be resettled in the region. In the end, this pertained mainly to a large group of Bondelswarts. The village management board (*dorpbestuur*) which was installed in terms of the Namaland Proclamation acted in effect as an instrument to bring the town into line against the claims of the Witboois to have the decisive say in their traditional capital.

A central problem which was exacerbated rather than resolved by the Namaland dispensation was the land question. The Odendaal Plan as well as later administrative directives had claimed that there would be substantial gains in available land by the implementation of the homeland design. According to the Odendaal Plan, the 'gain' of the proposed homeland over the area of existing reserves would be well over 1 Mio hectares, which meant 'new availability of land 62 Ha. per capita' (RoSA 1964 § 395) Consequently, 1:1 compensation was envisaged as a rate of exchange from land available in the old against that in the new areas of residence for those who would have to move and a lot of reference was made even to new areas being much larger, even doubling the size of the former reserves.<sup>244</sup> But the reality was quite different: Planners soon had to note that the Kranzplatz reserve, especially in the easily accessible parts West of the motor road was

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<sup>243</sup> SecCR (D.J.Bosman) to Minister van Kleurlingsake, 18.11.1971; KAB:KUS B 24/3/D58/1.

<sup>244</sup> cf. H.M.S. Ferreira, Bantoesakekommissaris to Kommissaris-Generaal, Oshakati Ovamboland, 1.12.1967: Streeksbeplanning: Namaland, l.c.; also e.g. Herwinning en Nedersetting van Hanaus groep plase: Namaland. 16.10.1967; KAB:KUS B 23/2/D58.



'unplanned and undeveloped with trampled-down ground and annihilated vegetation in consequence of uninhibited overgrazing.'<sup>245</sup>

On the other hand, the formerly white-owned farms acquired by the government were already occupied, mainly by Bondelswarts farmers who had trekked from their former reserve because of the drought in the late 1960s.<sup>246</sup> Especially the Witboois stressed later that this had been their motive for letting the Bondels trek into areas to which they themselves traditionally claimed jurisdiction.<sup>247</sup> Again, administration officials noted that according to their plans, farms had been occupied while other groups such as the Topnaars or the Red Nation were still supposed to be received within the homeland.<sup>248</sup> These difficulties testify to the fact that the implementation of the homeland plan was not as orderly a bureaucratic exercise as the authorities may have hoped for. Rather, several processes seem to have intersected and did create, apparently, a rather chaotic picture. The Odendaal Plan did, contrary to appearances, not present a blueprint for the legal and constitutional set-up of the homeland it recommended. On the contrary, this evolved in the minds and practices of the officials in local and central offices as the implementation of the tangible provisions of the plan progressed - the buying out of the owners of the farms earmarked for inclusion into the homeland. By thus quasi-officially creating empty land, at least for the moment, the doors were thrown open for farmers moving in who had been hit by drought elsewhere, in this case in the old Bondels reserve or in Warmbad. This was part of established farming practice in a country where drought is a regular though dreaded occurrence. But in addition to this, the old claims of the groups established in the area since the mid-19th century militated against the idea of additional tribal authorities being established in what they considered their country, even though it had become alienated for various reasons 50-70 years ago. This was central especially to the response of the Witboois as the most seriously affected group; eventually, even at a time of harsh political confrontation during the late 1970s, officials noted that they were even further cramped in and impaired even according to government standards by the cutting off of land chunks from their territory when further groups were to be accommodated within the Northern part of the homeland.<sup>249</sup> But repercussions were also visible in Berseba where the two sections disputed access to the 'Odendaal farms' that had been reverted to them.<sup>250</sup>

The treatment of the land question in particular gives the impression of a project which was rather ill-conceived in central respects and also constantly revised during the decisive stages of implementation. One obvious explanation is that the rationale behind the whole process was not the development of the Nama as an ethnic group or nation but the South African Apartheid regime's over-all quest for the preservation of its power. This included the attempt to re-model social and economic relations and to find ways to physically accommodate and contain the majority. The trial and error approach also strengthens the

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<sup>245</sup> OS(L) to Sec 18.2.71, Namaland: Landboukundige beplanning van die Krantzplatzgebied; KAB:KUS B 23/2/D58.

<sup>246</sup> Memo, 16.10.1967, l.c.; H.M.S. Ferreira, Bantoesakekommissaris to Kommissaris-Generaal, Oshakati Ovamboland, 1.12.1967: Streeksbeplanning: Namaland, l.c.

<sup>247</sup> see Stamvergadering, Gibeon, 18.10.1971 ('Krantzplatz Agenda'); KAB:KUS B 24/4/D58 deel I.

<sup>248</sup> OS(L) to Sec 18.2.1971; l.c.; cf. also e.g. SecCR (J.J.Strydom) to S/V Wh, 10.9.1970; KAB:KUS B 23/2/D58.

<sup>249</sup> cf. SecCRN (Mills) to NSK, 13.6.1978; SecCRN (T.J.Bothma) to NSK, 17.7.1978; KAB:KUS B 24/4/D58/2.

<sup>250</sup> cf. e.g., S/V (Profitt) to SecCRN, 27.10.1970; KAB:KUA B 24/4/D57.

view that Namibia became a testing ground for socio-economic strategies designed eventually also for use in South Africa (cf. Gottschalk 1987). In addition, Namaland may have proved one of the most untractable areas for the homeland strategy, in the Police Zone of Namibia at any rate. Opposition from traditional communities was widespread, agricultural crisis was rife, and infrastructure certainly not conducive for building a coherent political system. The system's functioning and legitimacy were impaired further by the installment of a host of new institutions along with the removals effected prior to and after proclamation. As has been indicated, not the least consequence of these developments was a quagmire of competing rights and especially of claims to jurisdiction over territory and people. One of the telling effects that even outlasted the existence of the homeland is the establishment of a Bondelswarts population in Gibeon and vicinity, on traditional Witbooi territory, which after a generation of living there regard the town as well as the land they have used for so long as their home, without necessarily recognizing Witbooi claims to jurisdiction.

The combined effects of an overriding quest for sustained domination and administrative chaos also undermined the development initiatives officially linked to the homeland project, so far as they were ever taken seriously at all. There seems to have existed a certain measure of development enthusiasm among local officials during the early stages of the implementation of the Odendaal Plain. But as far as this went, this gave place soon to resignation, cynicism and in very few cases, even to opposition against the realities of the homeland dispensation.<sup>251</sup>

The homeland strategy, seen in the overall perspective of South African strategies and their effects in Namibia on traditional communities in the Southern part of the country, can be understood as one further step towards their sustained disorganization. They were disorganized over decades by massive state interference into their internal set-up and into their economy; by the marginalizing effects of treating the reserves primarily as labour reserves and therefore as residual entities that had to be made and kept functional to the needs of the settler and mining economy; and finally, by an inherently racist and technocratic development strategy which strove to harness the mobilizing potential of ethnic and identity politics to a grand design to preserve established privilege within Namibia and South African hegemony on a regional scale. The fabric of traditional communities most of which had crumbled after the blow of German colonial policies involving ethnocidal measures and large-scale deportation after the great rising in 1905, showed remarkable resilience when the chance for reconstruction seemed to have arrived with South African military occupation in 1915. The hopes and promises connected with what amounted to a change of colonial power were thoroughly frustrated, but the South African reserve policy contained ambiguities which held out a few marginal opportunities for traditional communities to avail themselves of. The homeland strategy may be understood as an attempt to make use of the potential which had surfaced in these experiences by grafting newly-conceived state structures on-to clearly articulated group and ethnic identities. But as this strategy aimed, above all at institutional and territorial separation between privileged and dominated sections of Namibian society, its inherent contradictions militated against the promises that were advanced to further its acceptance. The removals that formed a central and probably for a long time the most tangible part of the homeland design created a host of additional conflict that in its net effect went beyond the benefits that the powers in place could reap from a 'divide and rule' tactics. Seen as a project above

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<sup>251</sup> Interview E.R.Lüff (former regional representative of the CRN Department), Windhoek, 16.11.1995.

all in political development, this strategy was an effective failure long before the Nama Legislative Assembly quietly dissolved in 1989 to make place for new, decidedly non-ethnic institutions under the independence constitution. For traditional communities affected by the implementation of the Namaland project, its consequences are still very real, and they amount to disorganizing effects which their own structures and institutions still find extremely hard to absorb.

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Box SWAA 1119: A 158/1 Native Reserves General File, v1(1919-1923).

Box SWAA 1120: A 158/2 Native Reserves Regulations v1 (1924-1948).

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Box SWAA 1122: A 158/6 Native Reserves. Gibeon v1 (1918-1923).



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Box BAC 42: HN 1/15/4/7 Meetings. Berseba v1 (1955-62).  
Box BAC 50: HN 1/15/5/3 Jaarlikse Vergaderings: Nama v3 (1959-1960).  
Box BAC 62: HN 1/15/6/27 Hoofbantoekommissaris (1962-64)

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Bundle AGA 63: AG 18/1/1 Gebiedsregering Topnaars en Bondelswarts en SWA v1 (10.8.1978-3.4.1981).

Bundle AGA 106: AG 18/1 Namaraad v8 (11.1.1980-13.2.1980)

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Box KUS B/595: 23/2/D58 Landbou. Landboubeplanning en Statistiek. Gibeon Deel I (1967-1975).

Box KUS B/601: B 24/4/D57 Nama Owerhede Notules van Stam en Stamraadvergaderings. Berseba. Deel I (1970-1975)

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