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**The Ovambo Reserve Otjeru (1911-1938)
The Story of an African Community in Central Namibia**

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The Ovambo Reserve Otjeru (1911-1938) The Story of an African Community in Central Namibia¹

Giorgio Miescher

(Basler Afrika Bibliographien & University of Basel)

"In fact I regard this farm as one of the best in the country."

(Senior Officer of Lands to the Secretary of South West Africa, 3 August 1938 (NAN-LAN-406-916))

"Otjoruu was the best, because it was a good place, there was no apartheid, we were very happy."

(Herman Ihuhua, Kareitas (Pietrusfontein), 9 March 2004)

The year is 1911 after Christ. Central South West Africa was entirely occupied by the Germans. Well, not entirely... One small village of indomitable Africans still holds out against the invaders.²

We could indeed recount Otjeru's history in almost such a delightful way the French cartoonists Goscinny and Uderzo used to unfold the fate of that famous Gaul village and all its thrilling adventures in resisting Roman rule and hegemony. But alas, history sometimes lacks the spicy ingredients of fiction, and it was not a magic potion but, as we shall see, the unspectacular flow of daily life, various conditions and prerequisites, the coincidence of presence and absence of people, visionary acts of some and unfortunate omissions of others providing for the place's existence.

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the History Seminar at the University of Basel, 12.4.2005, and at the History Research Seminar at the University of the Western Cape, 10.8.2005. My thank goes to the colleagues in Basel and Cape Town whose comments pushed my thinking forward although I could only consider some inputs for the published version. The work presented is part of my PhD research on "the history of the red line in Namibia, 1890-1960" and is based on archival research undertaken in 2001/02 (supported by Freiwillige Akademische Gesellschaft Basel, Max Geldner Foundation Basel, Theodor Engelmann Stiftung Basel) and interviews done in 2004. The interviews quoted were done together with Lorena Rizzo in English and Otjiherero, a first translation was done by Pandeni Ihuhua and Titus Kaumunika on the spot and a second translation was done by Cheryl Mate in Windhoek. I would like to thank Dag Henrichsen and, especially, Lorena Rizzo for her critical comments and support when writing this paper.

² After René Goscinny and Albert Uderzo, *Asterix in Switzerland* (revised edition and English translation), London, 2004 [1970], p. 3.

The 26th of July in 1911 marks the official establishment of the so-called Ovambo reserve Otjeru. On this day, imperial Germany, represented by the *Bezirksamtmann* Schultze of Outjo and Wilhelm Amporo, representative of the inhabitants of Otjeru, signed a treaty over the lease of two farms, Otjeru and Okaura. The farms together comprised a territory of 10'000 ha, and the lease was fixed at 300 Marks a year.³ No time limit was enforced and the treaty was to keep validity for an indefinite period. The condition alone was that the leaseholders would stay loyal to the colonial government and would prove obedient to colonial law.

In the following pages I try to reconstruct the history of the settlement at Otjeru and of its inhabitants. My writing draws from oral information received by people whose family histories are deeply connected with the place, but is mainly based on archival sources produced by various colonial officials and missionaries. Without fully engaging with the discussion about the narratives of colonial archives and the ways these shape history I will make some clarification with regard to my own understanding.⁴ The colonial archives are based on the need and logic of the colonial project.⁵ The information produced by colonial officials is very biased and selective and the way it is stored and classified reflects colonial rule and order. The structure of the archive influences historical research and writing. Depending on the logic and interest of the colonial power, the people living at Otjeru are constructed and documented as a community at certain moment in times, whereas no evidence can be found of the very same people for other periods. The production of information by the colonial apparatus is very often connected to situations perceived as exceptional or pivotal by the colonial state and were therefore cause for special intervention. The main producers of information were the representatives of the colonial power, i.e. army or police officers, magistrates, etc. The realities of the colonial archive are not without consequences for the historian's research and writing. My reconstruction of the history of Otjeru, too, follows the logic of the archive, in so far as the density of my writing heavily depends on the availability of sources. Yet, instead of providing a streamlined narrative, the reader is continuously informed in what follows about the conditions of writing, the producers of information and the nature of the sources forming the backbone of this text.⁶

³ In those days circa the value three oxen (see i.a.: Anzeige von Ironga [Illoga?] gegen Prospektor Kaunath, Omaruru, 8.11.1910; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1).

⁴ It was first of all Premesh Lalu who pushed me to clarify how I am dealing with the nature of the colonial archive in this paper.

⁵ A good introduction into recent South African debates on this topic is provided by Carolyn Hamilton, Verne Harries, Jane Taylor, Michele Pickover, Graeme Raid, Razia Saleh (eds.), *Refiguring the Archive*, Cape Town, 2002.

⁶ By doing so, I hope to come closer to a balanced reading against and with the grain, as Anne Stoler calls it (In: Hamilton et al. (eds.), op. cit., pp. 91-92).

The establishment of a prosperous settlement

The first archival 'evidence' on the inhabitants of Otjeru, i.e. on the so-called "Ovambo-settlement" between the north-western towns of Omaruru and Outjo, are official correspondences by the Outjo and the Omaruru district offices to the colonial authorities in Windhoek dated 1906.⁷ According to the correspondence, a group of so-called "Ovambo", consisting of 10 men with some servants, 23 women and 30 children was by that time living at Otjitoroa in the Omaruru district.⁸ The "Ovambo group"⁹ was said to have been residing there, and at a place called Okarumue nearby since before the outbreak of the Southwest African war in 1904.¹⁰ Unlike the majority of the African population living in central Namibia, the group did not join the contesting parties, but instead remained loyal to the colonial power. To protect themselves, and to remain outside the fighting, they moved to the town of Outjo, which was then the nearest German military garrison-town. They were apparently well received by a colonial government, which had come under serious pressure from its colonised counterpart. The "Ovambo group" was allocated a place to stay (Aimab, 30 kilometres north of Outjo, on the road to the then "Ovamboland") by the German military authorities. But the war situation was soon felt in the area too, as cattle theft was one of the many risks local farmers had to face. The group got involved in small scale fighting, while they tried to protect their herds from the revolting forces. Again, they had to move as the German forces decided to concentrate farmers at Cauas, a fortified farm west of Outjo. There they spent the following months together with the local German farmers as "comrades in arms" until the danger was over.¹¹ Due to their loyalty and their reluctance to join the African resistance against colonial rule, which in the end was unsuccessful, they ended up in a privileged position when the war was over. Although the group had to render most of their arms after the war,¹² the local colonial authorities proved thankful and generous – at least in their own perception – and allowed them to return to their pre-war place of residence Otjitoroa.¹³ The officer-in-charge in

⁷ Nachrichten über das Ovamboland, Outjo 16.3.1906, gez. v. Wangenheim; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-1 v1 and Distriktamt Omaruru an Gouvernement, 9.4.1906; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6.

⁸ Distriktamt Omaruru an Gouvernement, 9.4.1906; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6.

⁹ The ethnic classification of this group of men and women will be discussed later, the term "Ovambo group" used here relates to the way this group of people is referred to in the documents quoted.

¹⁰ According to v. Wangenheim Nicodemus Ndinda lived at Okarumue where he had built two nice rectangular clay buildings (Nachrichten über das Ovamboland, Outjo 16.3.1906, gez. v. Wangenheim; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-1 v1).

¹¹ Nachrichten über das Ovamboland, Outjo 16.3.1906, gez. v. Wangenheim; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-1 v1.

¹² Polizeistation Ekotaveni, 30.12.1909; NAN-ZBU-W-II-K-6.

¹³ Bezirksamt Outjo an Gouvernement, 2.3.1910; NAN-ZBU-W-II-K-6.

Omaruru eventually sent a request to his superiors in Windhoek, asking for permission to provide the "Ovambo group" a place to stay, be it for temporary residence only or for sale. As the group did not want to go back to Owambo, and in view of their wealth in wagons, oxen, and a herd consisting of 300 head of cattle and 500 head of small-stock, the officer in Omaruru supported the group's remaining in the region.¹⁴ Permission to buy a farm was not granted by the Windhoek authorities. The group was only given a temporary permission to settle by the authorities in Windhoek in 1906.¹⁵ As their previous settlement in Otjitoroa was surveyed as a farm for settler use,¹⁶ in the end the place Otjeru,¹⁷ lying around 25 kilometres north of Otjitoroa, was allocated to the "Ovambo group" in 1908.

There is enough archival information available to reconstruct a quite detailed picture of the settlement at Otjeru in 1909/1910. According to police reports the settlement was socially stratified.¹⁸ On the one hand there were 11 cattle owners, two of them owning over 50 head of cattle, who were all ethnically labelled as "Ovambo". All of them lived with their families in their own households scattered along the river, a tributary of the Ugab River, running through the area. On the other hand, there were 30 dependent men with their families and 17 dependent single women working as herders for the cattle owners in Otjeru. The latter seem to have owned some small stock, but no cattle, and most of them were listed as having a different ethnic background, namely "Herero", "Damara", "Nama" or "Bushmen".¹⁹ Additionally, Otjeru had a local teacher, an Otjiherero speaking man, who as a church person (from the Rhenish Mission) occupied a special position within the community. Wilhelm Amporo, a cattle owner (although not the wealthiest one), was accepted as the representative of the community by the colonial authority and seemingly by the inhabitants. The total number of stock owned by the residents of Otjeru was some 400 head of cattle and some 500

¹⁴ Distriktamt Omaruru an Gouvernement, 9.4.1906; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6.

¹⁵ The permission could be recalled at any time ("jederzeit widerrufbar") (Gouvernement to Distriktsamt Omaruru [Draft], 7.5.1906; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6).

¹⁶ It is not clear when exactly the place Otjeru was allocated and by whom. Archival sources (Gouvernement an den Praeses der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft, 20.2.1908; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6) as well as oral information (Interview with Walter Mbarandongo, Farm Mopane, Fransfontein, 11.3.2004) indicate that Hauptmann Franke allocated Otjeru.

¹⁷ Otjeru or Otjoruu as the place was called in the interviews owes its name to the rush/reed cane ("Schilfrohr") growing in the riverbed (Interview with Bertha Ihuhua Nerongo, Karetas (Fransfontein), 9.3.2004).

¹⁸ Bericht von Polizeisergeant Schröder, Polizei Station Ekotaveni, 30.12.1909; Viehbestand in Otjeru zusammengestellt von Polizeisergeant Schröder, no date; list of inhabitants by Polizeisergeant Schröder, no date (BOU-8-OIII v1).

¹⁹ In the sources the notions "Herero", "Berg-Damara", "Hottentotten", "Buschleute" were used.

head of small stock.²⁰ Besides stock-farming, people were involved in intensive gardening. Along the river bed, 20 pieces of land were designated and distributed between the households and some individuals. The gardens were cultivated separately and an irrigation system made maize, potatoes, corn, tobacco and other vegetables grow successfully. In addition, some of the inhabitants were temporarily working outside the farm, i.e. as transport drivers ("Frachtfahrer") in places nearby, such as Kalkfeld, Omaruru, and Outjo.²¹ Generally speaking, the settlement was perceived in the various colonial documents as prosperous.

Both the colonial authorities in the region and the government in Windhoek had no problem with the existence of an African settlement in Otjeru. People living there were not only granted the exceptional right to own cattle, a privilege which in the period following the war was not given to Africans.²² Additionally, their request to have the farm allocated to them permanently was well received by the colonial authorities in 1910. Although they could not own the land as their legal possession, they had the right to stay there as long as they remain loyal to the colonial government.²³

There were indeed reasons for the German government's supportive position with regard to Otjeru and its population, and these were rooted most of all in the strategic significance the establishment and flourishing of an "Ovambo reserve" in central Namibia, i.e. within the area under German control, would have: Owambo, the region lying beyond the Etosha salt pan in the very north of today Namibia, was much more densely populated than the central and southern parts of the colony, and was therefore of crucial importance as a supplier of labour for the colonial economy. Plans to bring Owambo under direct colonial control existed at least since the late 1890s, but the German military never made a serious attempt to do so, mainly because of the very high costs and risks such an operation would have generated.²⁴ Instead, the flow of labour was to be achieved by a few military expeditions, diplomatic efforts, the

²⁰ The number of stock, especially cattle, was considerable higher in comparison with the figures available for the war period.

²¹ Bezirksamt Outjo an Gouvernement [Entwurf], 29.9.1910; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1.

²² Wolfgang Werner, "No One Will Become Rich". Economy and Society in the Herero Reserves in Namibia, 1915-1946, Basel, 1998, p. 47. Werner by quoting Helmut Bley notes that Africans could have large stock only with special permission, which was never granted until 1912.

²³ See Bezirksamt Outjo an Gouvernement, 2.3.1910 and handwritten comment signed with Görgens at the bottom of this letter; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6, and, Gouvernement an Bezirksamt Outjo, 30.3.1910; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1.

²⁴ See on this topic i.a. Martti Eirola, The Ovambogefahr. The Ovamboland Reservation in the Making, Rovaniemi, 1992.

work of missionaries and a policy of economic isolation, implemented in 1906.²⁵ The establishment of an "Ovambo reserve" in central Namibia by the colonial authorities in Windhoek was part of a policy of making German rule attractive to Africans or, more precisely, particularly to Africans from northern Namibia. The intention was to give evidence for the quality life under the protection of the German emperor would have for "Ovambo" commons in contrast to their being subjects of their respective kings at home.²⁶ In addition, Otjeru was meant to be a place where the German government could recruit loyal men as guides and translators for future expeditions to the north.²⁷ To secure the economic success of the Otjeru villagers, no limitations were imposed on the possession of stock and the rent which corresponded with the equivalent of what was commonly charged by the government from all its subjects, i.e. settlers.²⁸ It was in line with the logics of this propaganda that the right to live at Otjeru was first of all granted to people originating from Owambo and their families. A limited number of people of various origins were accepted as long as they were employed as farm workers, yet the German administration aimed to keep their number as low as possible.²⁹

Who were the people living at Otjeru in the 1910s? In the treaty signed on the 26th of July 1911 fifteen male names but no family names were listed. Based on an integrated reading of the archival sources and on interviews done in Fransfontein in March 2004, I was able to identify the men mentioned in the treaty.³⁰ Only little is known on how these men came to live in central Namibia, and there are contradictory accounts. In the first detailed comment on

²⁵ Patricia Hayes discusses this politics of isolation in her unpublished PhD, *A History of the Ovambo of Namibia, c. 1880-1935*, Cambridge, 1992.

²⁶ Görgens, a German official in Windhoek (surveyor general?), formulated this policy very clearly: "Erfährt man nach u. nach im Amboland, dass unter dem Schutz der Regierung hier Ovambos ungestört leben u. arbeiten können, so halt ich es nicht für ausgeschlossen, dass auch noch andere Leute Otjeru vorziehen werden gegenüber dem unsicheren Leben unter ihren Häuptlingen." (handwritten notes under a letter of the Bezirksamt Outjo to the Gouvernement, 2.3.1910; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6). – When the government finally agreed on the establishment of an "Ovambo" reserve, the authorities in Outjo had to make sure that the missionaries would spread this information in Owambo (Gouvernement an Distriktsamt Outjo, 23.2.1911 [Entwurf]; NAN- ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6).

²⁷ See i.a. "Eine Ovambo-Siedlung im Hereroland", in *Deutsches Kolonialblatt*, XXI, 1910, p. 466. Otjeru as a possible reservoir of labour force was not in the centre of the colonial authorities' considerations although the option of additional settlers from Owambo was positively discussed (Gouvernement an Bezirksamt Outjo, 30.3.1910; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1).

²⁸ Concerning the amount of money to pay as rent see i.a.: Gouvernement an Bezirksamt Outjo, 30.3.1910; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1.

²⁹ Gouvernement an Distriktsamt Outjo, 23.2.1911 [Entwurf]; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6.

³⁰ I.e. Wilhelm Amporo, Joshua Ihuhua, Immanuel Shangula (or Amtana), Nicodemus Ndinda, Micka Bamm, Cornelius Fudika, Kleophas Mbarandonga (or Mukuju), Gabriel Shangula, Theodor Kuzera (or Ujera), Kambua (Timotheus) Mushinga/Mutjinga, Kaleb (Kalub) Kambanda, Lazarus Amporo, Kapuka Mbarandonga, Kanaure Uanguba, Josef Kambanda (or Tjikua).

the group's past written by von Wangenheim in 1906,³¹ some men from Owambo were said to have made some money in railway construction and the erection of the jetty in Swakopmund. With their income they bought cattle and decided to settle between Outjo and Omaruru, instead of returning to the north. There were originally two settlements. Wilhelm Amporo, Gabriel Shangula and Josua Ihuhua and others stayed at Otjitoroa whereas Nicodemus Ndinda lived at Okarumue nearby.³² Both settlements were under the protection of the respective local Herero leaders to whom they paid tribute. At least Nicodemus Ndinda's decision to stay in central Namibia was among other things rooted in older quarrels over inheritance with the Ndonga chief Nehale. Written sources date the migration of these men to central Namibia around 1880.³³ Oral information tends to name trade as the reason for the group's emigration and their remaining south of their place of origin.³⁴ For some individuals a few more biographic details can be given: Josua Ihuhua was raised by German missionaries as his mother had past away when he was still a child, for instance, and he was then brought to central Namibia.³⁵ At the Rhenish Mission school in Okahandja, the Augustineum, he got some biblical training.³⁶ Kleophas Mbarandonga had no roots in Owambo and was listed as Tswana in the church documents,³⁷ but was registered as "Ovambo" in the colonial documents. According to his descendants he lived for a while in southern Angola and was married to a woman from there before moving to central Namibia and finally "changed himself to an Ovambo" to get the right to stay at Otjeru.³⁸

Otjeru owes its existence as an officially recognised settlement with the legal status of a reserve to the Owambo origin of its leading men, be it real or pretended. A detailed police register of all households in Otjeru compiled in the early 1910s reveals that indeed most household heads (with one exception only men)³⁹ were classified as "Ovambo" by the police,

³¹ Nachrichten über das Ovamboland, Outjo 16.3.1906, gez. v. Wangenheim; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-1 v1.

³² V. Wangenheim only identified the men by their Christian first name.

³³ Bezirksamt Outjo an Gouvernement 2.3.1910; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6.

³⁴ Interview with Katutu Mazenge and Herman Ihuhua, Pietrusfontein (Fransfontein), 10.3.2004. – In this interview Ndonga was named as the groups place of origin in Owambo. At least one of the influential men in Otjeru, Cornelius Fudika had a brother living in Ondonga, who was killed there in 1911 (Report of the Police Outjo, 4.5.1911; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1).

³⁵ Interview with Bertha Ihuhua Nerongo, grandchild of Joshua Ihuhua, Karetas (Fransfontein), 9.3.2004.

³⁶ Missionary Trey mentioned in 1919, that Joshua Ihuhua was trained under missionary Viehe in the Augustineum (Trey, Bericht vom 1.-2. Quartal 1919, Outjo, 15.6.1919; Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.13 und 27.14).

³⁷ Nachschlagebuch A-Z [ca. 1914]; (Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.8).

³⁸ Interview with Rosina Mbarandongo, Mopane (Fransfontein), 11.3.2004 and interview with Walter Mbarandongo, Mopane (Fransfontein), 11.3.2004. Rosina Mbarandonga mentioned vaguely that her father Daniel, son of Kleophas Mbarandonga, was forced to move from southern Angola to central Namibia.

³⁹ The exception was a certain Josefina or Josefine, once listed as Ovambo once as Herero woman, who had 16 head of cattle and 30 head of small stock in 1910 (List compiled by Sergeant Schröder, 16.2.1910; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1).

whereas they were mostly married with women of a different ethnic background. The same is true for their workers, who were in the majority women.⁴⁰ Otjeru was in fact a polyglot place, where people probably spoke Oshiwambo, Otjiherero, Nama-Damara and some German and Afrikaans (Cape Dutch). Otjeru was a point of attraction, both for people who lived scattered in the area or who originated from settler farms in the region. Although there was some control by the colonial state, as people had to wear pass marks when they would leave the place, at Otjeru residents managed to stand their grounds against the arbitrariness of the colonial system.⁴¹ As such, Otjeru became a space where African farmers could build up an existence and become economically self-reliant, though fragile as they did not own the land. Yet, their economic success was also dependent, as with other farmers too, on the availability of additional labour force. Manpower was a crucial element in the farming economy of those days, be it African or European. No farm was fenced and herds had to be supervised by herders, who would protect them against beasts of prey, such as wild dogs and lions, or against human thieves. Gardening as well as agriculture was very labour intensive, too. The need for labour in Otjeru was covered, firstly, by the involvement of family members, and then by the hiring of dependent workers. The colonial authorities would limit the number of additional workers moving to Otjeru. A request by the Otjeru farmers to have former (war) prisoners allocated to their place was in fact turned down. Yet, the German government was reluctant to remove people who had already settled at the place, as they continued to support Otjeru as an example of African prosperity under German colonial rule. The authorities tended to avoid any feeling of uneasiness among the Otjeru farmers and sustained an ambiance of security and trust.⁴² German settlers in the area regularly complained about the competition resulting from Otjeru and had no appreciation for the government's protection of their African rivals.⁴³

While the colonial administration would support its economic prosperity, the mission society operating in the area, the Rhenish Mission Society, was rather suspicious about it. Tensions between Otjeru's entrepreneurial spirit and its religious development continuously emerged in the reports by the missionaries. Rarely, they would note after visiting their outpost, there was indeed some interest in intellectual and religious matters. This regardless of the fact, that since

⁴⁰ Verzeichnis der Eingeborenen in Ojeru (getrennt nach Haushaltungen); NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1.

⁴¹ E.g., an inhabitant of Otjeru made a complaint against a German citizen who failed to pay for an oxen to the police in 1910. The police investigated the quarrel and the man from Otjeru immediately got his money (NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1).

⁴² Gouverneur Seitz an Bezirksamt Outjo, 23.2.1911; NAN-BOU-8-OIII v1.

⁴³ See for example the complaint by the German farmer Stier, Farm Otjikango, 3.3.1912; NAN-ZBU-2039-W-II-K-6. The farm Otjikango was situated 35 kilometres southeast of Otjeru.

1909, the community of Otjeru had employed a teacher, who provided the residents with religious services and instructed 19 boys and 14 girls in reading, writing and counting.⁴⁴ As soon as the settlement's future was secured in 1911, the community decided to build a permanent stone church, replacing the older provisional building. In 1913, the church was furnished with a bell, donated by the Sunday school of a church in Germany, which became one of the symbols of the community's well-doing.⁴⁵

Minimal colonial interference

The history of Otjeru – as reconstructed so far – was quite exceptional in post war German South West Africa. Whereas the general policy of the colonial power was to subject African pastoralists "to a forced labour system designed to meet the demands of the fledging settler colony",⁴⁶ people of Otjeru got the chance to establish themselves as farmers and were able to compete with European settlers in the region. In other words, whereas most Africans had to work under precarious and often inhuman conditions as farm, mining or domestic workers, the Otjeru people were independent peasants and stock-farmers. Additionally, they used options to create an extra income, through transport work with their own ox-wagons and limited wage labour, without losing their economic independence.

South Africa's military campaign in 1915 ended in the capitulation of the German troops. The years following the collapse of the old colonial regime opened up new possibilities to the colonized subjects in central Namibia, at least as long as the new power was not yet effectively established. In a process described by Wolfgang Werner as self-peasantization, many farm workers withdrew from wage labour and attempted to make a living out of stock acquired in various ways, including the theft of their former master's animals.⁴⁷ As in other parts of central Namibia, settler farmers in the Outjo district could find themselves

⁴⁴ Annual Report for 1909 on the work of the Rhenish Mission society in the district of Outjo, written by H. Brockmann (Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.8). – The first teacher was called Thomas. He was succeeded by Erastus Jahanika in 1911/12 (Jahresbericht Outjo 1909 and Konferenzbericht Outjo 1911-12; Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.13 and 27.14).

⁴⁵ See Quartalsbericht 1913, Outjo, 10. April 1913; Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.13 and 27.14. – Much later the bell was taken away from Otjeru and brought to Otjiwarongo by a German. A loss or theft still bitterly remembered by the former inhabitants of Otjeru (Interview Rosina Mbarandongo, Mopane (Fransfontein), 11.3.2004).

⁴⁶ Werner, op. cit., p. 54.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 57ff. According to Werner (p. 59), the process of self-peasantization was favoured by the abolition of the prohibition of stock owned by Africans. Additionally this process was supported by the general economic

unexpectedly deprived of most of their workers. Small temporary African settlements emerged at waterholes or on deserted farms, some of them with a considerable amount of large stock, others with just a few goats or sheep.⁴⁸ Africans also moved to parts of the then Outjo district which for sometime had no military or police presence as, for instance, Kaoko or the Game Reserve around the Etosha Pan.⁴⁹ The successful self-peasantization of Africans and their reluctance to wage labour increased the labour shortage of the settler economy. Finally, the South African administrator appointed a small commission to investigate the "native question which, in South West Africa, is synonymous with the labour question".⁵⁰ The commission had to investigate the existing African labour force potentially available, men and women, and had to give recommendations on how to make a better use of it in order to supply the settler economy with sufficient farm and domestic workers.⁵¹ The commission travelled through southern and central Namibia, made an inventory of existing African settlements and reserves and listed the complaints of the parties involved, namely "natives" and "whites". The commission's final report recommended provisions to be made for a better administration, control and exploitation of African labour.⁵² With regard to the settlement of Africans, the commission defined reserves for every district. Its selection was guided by a policy of segregation which aimed at avoiding "black islands," and for this reason it set aside "large areas in outlying parts of the country".⁵³ The commission listed three existing reserves for the Outjo district, Otjeru being one of them.⁵⁴ Otjeru's closing down was first recommended in order to concentrate African settlement in the region lying between Outjo and the Etosha Pan.⁵⁵ It took a while until the commission got aware of the fact that the treaty of 1911 gave the

weakness of the settler economy, which in desperate need of labour paid their farm workers with stock instead of cash and so enabling them to build up their own herds (Werner, pp. 69ff.).

⁴⁸ Due to the generally weak police control in the district, evidences of these settlements could only be traced in the archives in case the settlements lasted for a certain period of time. The Native Reserve Commission Report of 1921 only names Aimab (NAN-SWAA-1121-A158/4); other places are e.g. mentioned in a Fransfontein Police Report on "Natives residing in the Ugab River" 16.6.1922 (NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1).

⁴⁹ "Many well known Natives having left for the Game Reserve where they live on game, veld-kos and stealing." (Annual Report 1918, Military Magistrate Outjo to Secretary, 2.1.1919; NAN-107-3376/3). See also: Konferenzbericht Outjo; 1913-1920, Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.13 and 27.14.

⁵⁰ Union of South Africa, South -West Africa Territory. Report of the Administrator for the Year 1920. Cape Town, 1921, p. 13.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Report of the Native Reserves Commission, 8.6.1921; NAN-SWAA-1121-A158/4.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 20.

⁵⁴ The other two were Aimab and Fransfontein (Ibid., annexure "B"). Therein 5'000 ha were stated as being the size of Otjeru, a figure corresponding with the surveyed farm Otjeru but not with the reserve Otjeru granted by the German colonial government. The forth existing reserve in the district, Sesfontein, was not visited and not considered (Ibid., p. 1).

⁵⁵ In fact the provisional reserve at Aimab should have been substantially enlarged, whereas Fransfontein and Otjeru should have been closed down (Minutes of meeting of the Native Reserves Commission for South West Africa, held at Windhoek on the 21st June 1921, p. 5; NAN-LAN-25-35).

leaseholders the right to continue the lease as long as they remained loyal and obedient. Consequently, the settlement at Otjeru remained untouched for the next few years.

The settler economy faced a general crisis after 1915.⁵⁶ In the Outjo district, the economic weakness was worsened by outbreaks of lungsickness (Bovine Pleuropneumonia), a contagious cattle disease. The outbreaks, prevalent in the far north of Namibia like Owambo but brought under control in central Namibia until 1915, forced the South African veterinaries to impose not only quarantines on the affected herds, but to qualify the whole northern part of central Namibia as potentially infected.⁵⁷ Export of cattle from the northern districts of Grootfontein and Outjo to the south was severely restricted, and farmers of the Outjo district had only very limited access to the important South African market.⁵⁸ The settlers' crisis culminated in 1922, when more than half of the farmers in the Outjo district signed a petition to the Administration in which they threatened to leave the district definitely, in case the quarantine would not be lifted.⁵⁹ Eventually, all restrictions were removed in 1924.⁶⁰

Let us turn back to Otjeru. Generally speaking, the information on Otjeru and on its inhabitants in the colonial archives is very thin. It is only here and there that a very short note could be found in the Rhenish Mission archive in Windhoek, whereas it is not before the year 1920 that I could trace any reports, mainly written by the Magistrate in Outjo, in the Namibian National Archive. The sparse information available on Otjeru gives no indication of an economic decline of the settlement after 1915. The inhabitants had to cope with various difficulties, be it the drought of 1916 forcing them to leave the place temporarily in search of grazing, or the influenza pandemic of 1918 causing the death of 12% of the inhabitants.⁶¹ Nevertheless, the official reports noted a slight growth of stock numbers at the place, reaching around 700 head of large and 2600 head of small stock in 1920.⁶² Additional cash income was derived from occasional work, such as the transport of salt from the Etosha Pan or the training

⁵⁶ Werner, *op. cit.*, pp. 66f.

⁵⁷ Only the parts of the country lying south of 22 degrees latitude were qualified as absolutely free of lungsickness (Lee Lt. Col. to Veterinary (Pretoria), 1.6.1917; NAN-ADM-60-993/6). In consequence cattle export to South Africa was – if at all – only possible from farms lying beyond 22 degrees until late 1918 (Werner, 1998, pp. 64-65).

⁵⁸ See i.a. Veterinary Officer Grootfontein to Senior Veterinary Officer, Windhoek, 7.6.1920; NAN-ADM-60-993/6 and the correspondence concerning this topic 1921-1925 in the file NAN-SWAA-2238-A502/8.

⁵⁹ Petition signed by 31 farmers, 28.8.1922; NAN-SWAA-2238-A502/8.

⁶⁰ Senior Veterinary Officer, Windhoek, to Vet. Officer, Otjiwarongo, 25.7.1924; NAN-AGV-90-V1/1 v2.

⁶¹ Jahresberichte Outjo 1916 and 1918 (Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.13 and 27.14).

⁶² Magistrate Outjo to Secretary, 10.8.1920; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1.

of trek-oxen.⁶³ At least one member, Micka Bamm, worked as translator for the South African administration in Grootfontein.⁶⁴ The relative wealth of most people living in Otjeru is also reflected in the reports of the Rhenish Mission Society.⁶⁵

The sparse archival representation of Otjeru seemingly coincides with the generally very little interference in Otjeru by the new colonial administration during the first years of its rule in Namibia. The original reason for the establishment of this specific "Ovambo" reserve, i.e. to give a positive example of colonial rule, had lost its validity when South African forces occupied the whole territory, including the far north in 1915. Nevertheless, the legal status of Otjeru as a reserve was first confirmed in 1918.⁶⁶ Wilhelm Amporo was accepted as a headman by the South African magistrate in Outjo and it was agreed that the yearly lease of £ 15 should be paid commonly by the then 18 stockowners. These were fairly good conditions for Africans in those days, as the grazing fees normally charged would have been over £ 100 pounds for a year. Yet, some conflicts occurred in Otjeru as one of the stockowners, Cornelius Fudika, refused to pay his share of the lease as well as his part of the headman's compensation. Later, Fudika, by far the richest man, seemingly was obliged either to submit to exceptional taxation by the other inhabitants or to leave the settlement. After several years, the dispute led to an intervention by the Magistrate of Outjo, on the occasion of one of his very rare visits of the place in 1924.⁶⁷

There was a certain connection, I would argue, between the economic stagnation if not decline of the settler economy in the Outjo district and the colonial authorities' indulgence towards an African settlement such as Otjeru. The quarantine had rendered life for settlers very difficult. It was not before the uplifting of restrictions that the district became interesting for settler farming activities again.⁶⁸ To support European immigration, from the mid-1920s onwards the colonial power began to eliminate what was called "black islands": it moved African settlements to the outskirts. However, in Otjeru the administration had to respect the lease regulations. Knowing that in the meantime the inhabitants of Otjeru had grown in

⁶³ Kapuka Mbarandonga was fetching salt in the Etosha Pan for a certain Hancock from Outjo (Game Warden to Mag. Outjo, 15.7.1921; NAN-ADM-128-5503/1) and Wilhelm (Amporo?) was training oxen for a farmer from Kalkfeld (Engelhard to Mag. Outjo, 19.10.1920; NAN-AGV-90-V1/1 v1).

⁶⁴ See correspondence re Micka Bamm of 1924 in NAN-LOU-3/1/1-2/2/1920.

⁶⁵ Jahresberichte, etc (Rhenish Mission Archives Windhoek, Box VII 27.13 and 27.14).

⁶⁶ Magistrate Outjo to Secretary, 10.8.1920; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1.

⁶⁷ Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 4.3.1924; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1. – The last visit of a Magistrate dated from 1920, when Wilhelm Amporo was given a rifle to protect the herds against wild dogs (Magistrate Outjo to Secretary, 3.6.1920; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1).

⁶⁸ A memo to the Administrator concerning the Aimab settlement, dated 12.12.1923 confirms this thesis (NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1).

number the authorities in Windhoek commissioned the native commissioner T. Edwards to investigate on the spot who was living on the farms and what the inhabitants' legal status was.⁶⁹ Edwards reported a total population of 239 persons, of which 55 were original leaseholders and their descendants. The stock owned by the inhabitants of Otjeru was about 1'500 head of large and nearly 9'000 head of small stock. Additionally the settlement had spread over three unoccupied neighbouring farms, besides the two farms Otjeru and Okaura granted by the Germans. Edwards accused Wilhelm Amporo and his men to have violated the treaty. According to the native commissioner this transgression meant that they had lost the right to stay.

The figures given by Edwards were indeed the highest ever recorded for the settlement at Otjeru. How are they to be understood? Firstly, Otjeru must have attracted people in the years preceding 1926, as it was a place where Africans were not bothered by the police for squatting illegally. In addition people squatting in the Outjo district were sent to Otjeru by the Magistrate of Outjo as, for instance, a group of so-called "Damaras" living with their stock illegally on private farms near Outjo a few years before.⁷⁰ Otjeru's leading men, who regarded themselves as the owners or at least as the *de facto* owners of the land,⁷¹ welcomed the newcomers, as it meant the availability of additional work force.⁷² Edwards' accusation, stating that people at Otjeru would use a larger area than they had originally been granted, needs some explanation: When German colonial rule was taken over by South Africa in 1915 there were only 68 farms owned by European in the Outjo district.⁷³ Compared to the 38 occupied farms in 1910 the number was considerably high, but with regard to the vastness of the district it was very small, and it further dropped until the early 1920s.⁷⁴ A contemporary map reveals that the farms were very scattered and that all of them were situated at favourable places along riverbeds or at fountains; i.e. places with sufficient permanent water and grazing.

⁶⁹ Native Commissioner to Secretary, 5.8.1926; NAN-SWA-1194-A158/104.

⁷⁰ Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 19.9.1923; NAN-SWAA-A158/24 v1.

⁷¹ This is my presumption, based to begin with on the fact that the lease clearly was signed for an indefinite period. The perception that Otjeru was *de facto* owned by the leaseholders was shared by the Magistrate of Outjo at least up to 1926, in so far as he stated the same year that the people of Otjeru did have the right to give permission to settle on their place to other people (Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, 3.11.1926; NAN-SWA-1194-A158/104).

⁷² Herman Ihuhua confirmed, that "no one was chased away" and that people of different ethnic background came to the place but mostly "Damara who were living near Otjoruu" (Interview Herman Ihuhua, Pietrusfontein (Fransfontein), 9.3.2004).

⁷³ The figures are according to G.P. Kruger, Outjo, 1895 tot 1960, Geskiedenis en ontwikkeling van Outjo, no place, no date, p. 19 and p. 27.

⁷⁴ A list of the farms in the district (except Kaoko) patrolled by the Outjo police numbers 60 farms, including four occupied by Africans (i.e. Otjeru, Fransfontein, Aub, Aimab with Otjeru being the place with the greatest number of stock). Veterinary control was one of the pivotal duties of the police in those days and therefore

Movement of stock was not regulated by fences and not limited to the surveyed farm areas.⁷⁵ Like other farmers, people of Otjeru in case of drought and in search of grazing regularly trekked to un-occupied neighbouring territory, be it to surveyed farms or not. Additionally the German administration had put aside a third farm,⁷⁶ Klein Omburo, for further extension of the reserve, and the inhabitants made use of it very soon.⁷⁷

After Native Commissioner Edwards visited the place, Otjeru's existence was in real danger. The lease was cancelled by the Native Commissioner and would have lost its validity by the end of 1926 and all the inhabitants were ordered to go to the Otjihorongo reserve in the Omaruru district.⁷⁸ Wilhelm Amporo and his men strongly opposed this decision and stated that they would rather go to Kaoko instead of a place like Otjihorongo, with people they would not know and with no water and not sufficient grazing.⁷⁹ Finally, they managed to have the Magistrate of Outjo advocating their cause for future residence at Otjeru arguing that the residents of Otjeru have not violated any part of the lease regulations as they had the right to use the neighbouring farms as well as to sub-letting their land.⁸⁰ Despite this support the administration decided to dissolve the settlement. One concession made was that the survivors of the 11 original lease holders still alive were given a purely personal right to occupy, with their wives and their unmarried children, the two farms originally granted by the German colonial power.⁸¹ In 1927, thus, the population of Otjeru had dramatically diminished, and there were barely 400 head of large and some 2'600 head of small stock left.⁸² Wilhelm Amporo had died in the meantime, and Immanuel Shangula (or Amtana) followed him as the representative of the settlement.

virtually every farm was patrolled (See: Sheep Department. Staff. Patrol Areas. 1922-1923; NAN-AGV-174-V.S. 1/3).

⁷⁵ The most important control of stock movement was caused by the colonial authorities' veterinary policy to prevent the spread of diseases.

⁷⁶ Bezirksamt Outjo an Gouvernement, Windhoek, 20.11.1911; NAN-ZBU-2039-WII-K-6.

⁷⁷ It was mainly on this third farm whereto the settlement had expanded (Mag. Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 3.11.1926; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104).

⁷⁸ Native Commissioner to Magistrate Outjo, 11.8.1926; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104.

⁷⁹ Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 11.10.1926; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104.

⁸⁰ Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 3.11.1926; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104. The Magistrate forwarded with this correspondence a letter of Wilhelm Amporo on behalf of his people who asked to remain at the place and who offered to pay more money to the colonial government.

⁸¹ Native Commissioner to Secretary, 6.9.1927; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104. – By doing so the administration calculated that in foreseeable time the number of leaseholders would diminish by death and one farm could be already taken away before the last lessee would have past away.

⁸² Report re "removals native Otjeru", SWA Police, Outjo, 21.3.1927; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104. – The remaining leaseholders were: Josua Ihuha, Immanuel Shangula (or Amtana), Nicodemus Ndinda, Mi[c]ka Bamm, Joseph Kambonda, Gabriel Shangula, Kambua Mushinga, Kalub Kambonda, Lazarus Amporo, Kapuka Mbarandonga, Theodor Kuzera (Ujora).

Otjeru was not the only African settlement in the district dissolved in this period. People at Aimab, Otjiwasandu and Okaua suffered the same fate of being removed.⁸³ It was probably more than accidental that a few months before the removals were ordered, a request by the Outjo Farmer's and Settler's Association not only urged the administration to order corporal punishment for stock theft, but also asked for the dissolution of non-proclaimed African settlements. A strict application of the vagrancy act enabled the authorities to send e.g. young men and women from the Fransfontein reserve to work on farms.⁸⁴ The provisional reserves ceased to exist and a lot of Africans were deprived of their independence and self-reliance.⁸⁵ Yet, it took the colonial authorities another six years until they could claim that all so-called "unplaced natives in the Outjo district have now been moved into reserves".⁸⁶

Strangled and evicted

The administration's intervention of 1926/27 marked a turning point in the history of the settlement at Otjeru. After nearly two decades of prosperous development the remaining inhabitants progressively lost their base of existence. Within the following ten years the land surrounding Otjeru was successively allocated to immigrating 'white' settlers until the African settlement was physically encapsulated and economically suffocated.

South Africa's general policy to promote and support 'white' settlement in Namibia only affected the Outjo district with a certain delay and the influx of settlers into the district remained minimal until the late 1920s.⁸⁷ The same was true for the area in which Otjeru was situated. For quite a long period there was only one farm adjoining Otjeru owned by a European settler, and for whatever reason, be it due to the local topography or to the fact that it was private property since at least 1912, no conflicts were reported.⁸⁸ The presence of

⁸³ See i.a.: Native Commissioner to Magistrate Outjo, 30.9.1926; NAN-SWA-1150-A158/24 v1.

⁸⁴ Outjo Farmers' and Settlers' Association to the Government, 18.1.1926; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1.

⁸⁵ Some Africans in the Outjo district who were faced with the removal from temporary reserves wanted to buy farms instead of moving to the reserve. The Administration strictly refused to sell government farms. Whereas the purchase of a private farm would be possible under the condition that sufficient money could be shown (See Native Commissioner to Magistrate Outjo, 22.12.1926 concerning Headman Kavingovoria's wish to purchase a farm; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v1).

⁸⁶ Secretary to Administrator re "Native squatters in the Outjo district", 18.1.1932; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2.

⁸⁷ For a general overview of South Africa's policy see: Christo Botha, "The politics of Land Settlement in Namibia 1890-1960", in *South African Historical Journal*, 42 (May 2000), pp. 232-276. G.P. Kruger mentioned in his history of the Outjo district only a few names of new settlers for the 1920s (op. cit., pp. 28-29).

⁸⁸ Namely Oszemba (148), which was owned by a certain Neugebauer at least since 1910 and until 1922. See list of farms mentioned in footnote 72 and Hans Dietrich Moldzio, *Das waren noch Zeiten*, Windhoek, 1997, p. 91.

'white' settlers in the direct vicinity of Otjeru was, therefore, minimal until two neighbouring farms were leased by settlers in 1929.⁸⁹ The presence of these stock-owners caused a growing pressure on the farmers at Otjeru as they were deprived of resources they had relied on for decades, such as additional grazing in case of drought. However, the core area of the settlement along the river, comprising the farms Okaura (140), Otjeru (139) and Klein-Omburo (148), still remained untouched. In 1932/33 the administration went a step further and huge parts of the original reserve were given away under grazing licences to settlers: namely the farm Klein-Omburo (148) in 1932 and the farm Okaura (140) in 1933.⁹⁰ The inhabitants of Otjeru were now restricted to only 5000 hectares and deprived of some of their best land for grazing and gardening. Self-reliant farming became nearly impossible for the remaining families, especially as a great part of this piece of land was quite mountainous and not suitable for cattle.

The Otjeru inhabitants were not willing to give up their home easily, however, and they chose various strategies to survive.⁹¹ First, farm boundaries were simply ignored.⁹² Consequently, bitter quarrels with new neighbours occurred and led to police intervention to support the settler's interests.⁹³ Conflicts also resulted in thefts of African owned stock or garden products by the settlers. Oral accounts mention anecdotes with regard to farmer U.C. Schoeman, who after repeated complaints about unsettled conditions, used to mark every pumpkin growing on his side of the boundary with his initials.⁹⁴ Some inhabitants managed to arrange a kind of co-existence with 'white' settlers on nearby farms, and to remain at least temporarily on their land. 'White' farmers, who themselves struggled to make a living, had an interest in friendly terms, as the example of P.W. Malherbe shows. Malherbe occupied the neighbouring farm

⁸⁹ Namely farm Geduld (111) to P.W. Malherbe (NAN-LOU-3/1/10-15/1/2/111) and farm Iris (145) to Karl A.O.L. Linow (NAN-LOU-3/1/11-15/1/2/145).

⁹⁰ The northern part of the farm Okaura (140) was given under grazing licence first to P.W. Malherbe (1933), then to D.H. Botha and finally in 1937 to A.J. and J.J.M. Pienaar (NAN-LOU-3/1/11-15/1/2/140) whereas farm Klein-Omburo was given under grazing license to U.C. Schoemann in 1932, who finally bought the farm in 1945 (NAN-LOU-3/1/11-15/1/2/148).

⁹¹ The community's belief in its future is e.g. expressed in the fact, that a new school teacher (Hendrik Gertze, also known as Heinrich Sali) was employed in 1932 (Magistrate Outjo to Secretary, 12.12.1934; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2).

⁹² To ignore these boundaries was facilitated by the *de facto* non existence of fences. In 1938 only the short common boundary between Otjeru (139) and Geduld (111) was fenced in (Farm Inspection Report, 28.7.1938; NAN-LAN-406-916).

⁹³ As early as 1932 U.C. Schoemann complaint about stock from Otjeru grazing on the farm Klein-Omburo he got under grazing license (Correspondence between Magistrate Outjo and SWA Police, 23.3.1932 and 5.5.1932 (NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2).

⁹⁴ In interviews settlers were accused of having stolen stock and products, yet no evidence could be found in the archives (Interview with Walter Mbarandongo, Farm Mopane (Fransfontein), 11.3.2004 and Herman Ihuhua, Pietrusfontein (Fransfontein), 9.3.2004).

Geduld (111) under grazing license since 1929.⁹⁵ Eduard Johannes Bamm, a relative of one of Otjeru's original leaseholders, settled on the farm leased by Malherbe between 1932 and 1936 and did quite well. Due to an investigation of misappropriation and theft of loans led against Malherbe, Bamm was forced to move to Fransfontein in 1936.⁹⁶ One of the original leaseholders, Nicodemus Ndinda, alike was able to make a living both at Otjeru and on Palafontein (Otjozongondi).⁹⁷ Other original leaseholders had left the place completely and had settled in the Otjihoronggo reserve, Omaruru district, and the Otjituo reserve, Grootfontein district.⁹⁸ Besides being threatened by the physical expansion of the settler society, the inhabitants of Otjeru were in constant danger of losing their fragile right to stay. As a matter of fact, in case of death of one of the aged original leaseholders, their dependents could face immediate removal.⁹⁹

After years of firm resistance and various attempts to dodge their encapsulation, the remaining inhabitants ultimately lost the hope to keep Otjeru and gave up. In 1937, they agreed to leave their home. The then foreman of the community, Lazarus Amporo, went to the Magistrate Outjo to ask for permission to move to Fransfontein. The reason for this decision was stated as follows: "we are surrounded by European farmers and Settlers [sic] who have taken away the best grazing ground in the vicinity with the result that we can hardly exist at Otjiru".¹⁰⁰ Archival sources give no explanation for the Otjeru community's choice to go to Fransfontein. According to oral information, personal contacts between Otjeru and Fransfontein existed, as some members of the community had already moved to the place before. These predecessors seemingly informed about conditions in Fransfontein and paved the way

⁹⁵ Malherbe lost the few cattle he owned during the drought years of 1930-34. Various loans received from the government and private associations like Kleinbegin Kooperatiewe Landbouonderstands Maatskappy, Beperk, Outjo, did not lead to his economic success. In the late 1930s he was heavily indebted and had barley enough to live on (See i.a.: Branding certificate, 7.5.1934; Inspeksie en Brandmerking van Landraadsvee: Mnr P.W. Malherbe: Geduld, 7.8.1935; Magistrate Outjo to Senior Officer, Lands Branch, 1.10.1936; all documents in: NAN-LOU-3/1/10-15/1/2/111).

⁹⁶ Edward Johannes Bamm had 65 head of large and 500 head of small stock when interrogated in 1936 (Statement by Edward Johannes Bamm, 9.10.36; NAN-LOU-3/1/10-15/1/2/111).

⁹⁷ Station Commander SWA Police to Magistrate Outjo, 16.3.1937; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104.

⁹⁸ Gabriel Shangula went to Otjihoronggo already in 1927 (Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 25.10.1927; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104), whereas Micka Bamm went to Otjituo at an unknown date (Interview with Walter Mbarandongo, Farm Mopane (Fransfontein), 11.3.2004). According to Walter Mbarandongo, some people also left to Kaoko.

⁹⁹ After the death of Kalub Kambanda (1927) and Immanuel Shangula (August 1933), their families were only provisionally tolerated on Otjeru, although finally not removed (For Kalub Kambanda, see Magistrate Outjo to Native Commissioner, Windhoek, 25.10.1927, and for Immanuel Shangula, see Magistrate Outjo to Secretary, 20.2.1934; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104.

¹⁰⁰ Statement Lazarus Amporo before Magistrate Outjo, Outjo, 6.8.1937; NAN-SWAA-1194-A158/104. According to this statement, only Theodor Kuzera (Ujora) did not want to go to Fransfontein.

for the community.¹⁰¹ However, it is quite possible that the community, concerned about their being separated, preferred to take the initiative instead of just passively waiting for a foreseeable removal.

Fransfontein was situated a good 100 kilometres west of Otjeru at the uttermost edge of the so-called police zone, being the zone reserved for the purposes of the settler society. After the dissolution of Aimab and Otjeru, Fransfontein was the only official native reserve in the Outjo district. The African settlement was politically and socially dominated by Nama speaking Swartbooi families, who had migrated there from southern Namibia in the second half of the 19th century. The colonial authorities consequently classified the place as "Nama" reserve, where only so-called "Nama" and eventually "Damara" were supposed to settle.¹⁰² Their policy to resettle Africans in reserves remained rather unsuccessful, at least in Fransfontein, where population numbers continuously dropped until 1936.¹⁰³ In order to accommodate Nama speaking people scattered all over central Namibia, i.e. from places as far as Walvis Bay and the Grootfontein district,¹⁰⁴ the limits of the reserve were ultimately extended.¹⁰⁵ In colonial debates preceding the Fransfontein extension, the removal of the Otjeru community and the need to accommodate their comparable high numbers of stock played an important role. The former leaseholders of the "Ovambo reserve" were able to convince the authorities that they did not want to go back to Owambo, as they were married to local women and their children could not even speak their fathers' native language.¹⁰⁶ The community of Otjeru, consisting by then of 76 people with 400 large, 2000 small stock and some donkeys, started to move on their ox-wagons to Fransfontein by August 1938.¹⁰⁷ There, the Otjeru people were well received and given places to settle.¹⁰⁸ The new farming area did not offer the same possibilities with regard to grazing and the availability of water. Gardening, which had been so rich

¹⁰¹ Walter Mbarandongo named a Native Constable Bamm who went to Fransfontein and could convince himself about the living conditions there (Interview, 11.3.2004) Another source mentioned three 'Ovambo' men from Otjeru ("Izak Amtana", "Elia Amyera", "Zacharias Noyoma") who wanted to trek with their families and their stock to Fransfontein in June 1937 (NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2).

¹⁰² Chief Native Commissioner, Windhoek, to Native Commissioner, Outjo, 6.4.1937; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ See i.a. SWA Police to Magistrate Outjo, 7.1.1936; NAN- SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2.

¹⁰⁵ Government Notice No 62, 16.4.1938.

¹⁰⁶ Memo to the Administrator re "Extension of Franzfontein Reserve and removal thereto of natives on farm Otjeru in the Outjo district", approved 5.4.1938; NAN-SWAA-1194-158/104.

¹⁰⁷ Farm Inspection Report, 26.7.1938; NAN-LAN-406-916. – The families moving to Fransfontein were according to the archival documents the ones of Lazarus Amporo, Josua Ihuhua, Timotheus Mushinga, Cornelius Ndinda, Daniel Mbarandongo, and eventually Theodor Kuzera.

¹⁰⁸ The fact that they were "warmly welcomed" was several times mentioned in the interviews done.

and sophisticated in Otjeru, became nearly impossible.¹⁰⁹ Beyond the immigration from Otjeru, movements to Fransfontein were significant in those years. Official figures indicate that the migration not only meant a rise in population numbers, but also led to a social shift, as the newcomers were wealthy stock owners. The total number of population nearly doubled between 1936 and 1939 (from 188 to 377 persons), whereas the number of stock grew five times in the same period (from 270 to 1137 large stock and from 2886 to 8831 small stock).¹¹⁰ The arrival of the Otjeru community was also reflected in the population census in the reserve, where 20% of the reserve's inhabitants were now labelled as "Ovambo".¹¹¹

Conclusion

"In fact I regard this farm as one of the best in the country", wrote the Senior Officer for Lands, who visited the farm Otjeru in August 1938, and he estimated its value to £ 2'500.¹¹² The officer's estimation underlined the successful and sustainable use of the farm by the Otjeru community during the three decades before. Without any financial support the inhabitants of Otjeru had built up the place, achieved and maintained their economic independence until they were forced to give up, due to the expanding settler society. Numerous settlers applied to exchange their properties, which came to lie in newly proclaimed native reserves, for the farm Otjeru, but were refused by the administration in view of Otjeru's high value.¹¹³ The following years the farm was used for temporary grazing and it was only in 1946 that the administration decided to advertise the farm, by then valued for only £ 726. Indeed, a farm inspection report revealed that the place had been neglected and overgrazed during the years before.¹¹⁴ The rapid decline put the quality of the Otjeru community's farm management in an even brighter light.

Yet, the history of Otjeru is more than a proof for farming capacities of an African community. In addition, it's an example of experiences made and strategies chosen by a group of Africans in a period of changing colonial rule and policies. The archival documentation

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Bertha Ihuhua Nerongo, Karetas, 9.3.2004. Note that the Otjeru people were *not* settled at the core of the Fransfontein reserve where strong permanent fountains allowed for irrigation.

¹¹⁰ Magistrate Outjo to Chief Native Commissioner, 22.2.1940; NAN-SWAA-1150-A158/24 v2.

¹¹¹ This is the case at least from late 1938 until 1940, reports for the following years were not considered.

¹¹² In a letter to the Secretary, 3.8.1938; NAN-LAN-406-916.

¹¹³ I.e. H. Janson wanted to exchange his property in Fransfontein for Otjeru (Dr. Hans Hirsekorn to Senior Officer Landsbranch, 22.4.1938; NAN-LAN-406-916) and C. Schlettwein his farm Warmbad near Sesfontein (Senior Officer Landsbranch to Secretary, n.d. circa April 1940; NAN-LAN-406-916).

¹¹⁴ Farm Inspection Report, 24.11.1945; NAN-LAN-406-916.

allows for the writing of a specific interpretation of history unfolding over more than three decades. Despite the importance which oral information had, my writing obviously remains determined by the structure of the colonial archives. My narrative, therefore, is rather about the fate of the people of Otjeru as an imagined and remembered community, than on the lives of the single men and women who once lived there. The Otjeru community's experience was in the beginning quite exceptional. Compared to most Africans in the colony, they were granted various privileges by the German colonial power, which enabled the leading men of the "Ovambo" reserve to remain self-reliant and to achieve some wealth. Under South African rule the community's fate was less exceptional. Otjeru's continuity as a place of successful African farming corresponds with the general process of African re-peasantization after 1915.

Yet, the case of Otjeru raises questions about the type and scale of involvement of people from Owambo living in central Namibia. Jan-Bart Gewald rightfully argued that recent Namibian historical studies, including his own¹¹⁵ have, with few exceptions, essentially been ethnic histories set within given geographical boundaries.¹¹⁶ He says so in an article on the migration of thousands of people from northern to central Namibia fleeing the threats of a severe famine in 1915, which for him was the beginning of the settlement of Oshiwambo speaking people in central Namibia. Although Gewald focuses on the refugee camps in Karibib he gives no indication whether at least some of the migrants travelled via Otjeru lying rather conveniently on their way. With a surprising clarity he claims that "yet, prior to 1915, Ovambo speakers were virtually non-existent in central and southern Namibia"¹¹⁷. Wilhelm Amporo and his friends might be an exception; more probably they are an indication for the probability of northern Namibians settling as farmers in the central regions.¹¹⁸

I have argued that in the Outjo district the pressure on land through the arrival of settlers from South Africa began later than in the southern parts of the country. But in the end, the colonial policy of removing Africans to reserves at the edges of the settler territory was successful in the Outjo district, too. Generally speaking, the argument sustained in recent historiography,

¹¹⁵ Jan-Bart Gewald, Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923, Oxford, 1999.

¹¹⁶ Jan-Bart Gewald, "Near Death in the Streets of Karibib: Famine, Migrant Labour and the Coming of Ovambo to Central Namibia", in Journal of African History, 44 (2003), pp. 211-239, p. 213.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 221. – By that Gewald ignores, for instance, the references Dag Henrichsen made to people from Owambo living temporarily or permanently in central Namibia throughout the 19th century (Dag Henrichsen, Herrschaft und Identifikation im vorkolonialen Namibia. Das Herero- und Damaraland im 19. Jahrhundert, unpublished PhD Hamburg, 1997, p. 111 and p. 141).

¹¹⁸ Generally, the fate of people originating from Owambo, who did not return but stayed in central Namibia, is rarely considered in historiography and, if at all, as for example in the recent article of Gewald (2003), the focus is on urban settlement.

that the consolidation of the South African colonial state in Namibia only started in the late 1920s and was continuing throughout the 1930s, is supported by the Otjeru example.¹¹⁹ In addition, the history of the Otjeru community highlights some regional aspects of the implementation of colonial policies and strategies chosen by Africans. The study of the small Otjeru community leads to questions with regard to the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual experiences and life in central Namibian settlements. Such a plurality in personal histories, origins and languages can also be observed in the case of the Fransfontein reserve in the late 1930s. Otjeru was a rather small settlement. Yet, it might rather be its ambiguous character – we may label it as a reserve "in the wrong region at a wrong moment in time" – which explains why the place is not considered in historiography.¹²⁰

Epilogue

Today, the farm Otjeru (139) roughly comprises half of the size it had from the 1910s to the 1940s. In more recent years, the southern parts of Otjeru were fused with the former farm Okaura (140) and renamed as farm Berghof (744).¹²¹ After having interviewed former inhabitants in Fransfontein in March 2004, I had the chance to visit Otjeru on my way back to Windhoek.¹²² I was quite curious to see the place which I had heard so much about in the days before. The farm is no longer used for farming purposes but only as temporary private hunting ground. A neighbouring farmer, Kobus Swart, directed us to the place and managed to overcome a variety of obstacles on our way. Although smaller, the farm still is a beautiful place, at least with regard to the natural scenery. Remains of the former "Ovambo" reserve are still visible and Kobus Swart showed us ruins of the former church and other buildings. What was most impressive was our visit to the old overgrown graveyard. On some tombstones the names of deceased inhabitants could be made out, names which by then were well known to me through documents and oral information. My short stay at the place which former inhabitants like to remember as a kind of paradise on earth, enforced my motivation to write this

¹¹⁹ For a general overview of the period between 1915 and 1920 see first of all Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester, Marion Wallace, Wolfram Hartmann (eds.), Namibia under South African Rule. Mobility and Containment 1915-1946, Oxford/Windhoek/Athens, 1998. Therein the question of periodisation is discussed in Jeremy Silvester, Marion Wallace and Patricia Hayes, "'Trees Never Meet'. Mobility and Containment: An Overview 1915-1946", pp. 22-26.

¹²⁰ I only know of a newspaper article on the history of Otjeru which was written by Mr. Botha, living in Outjo, and published in the Windhoek Observer some years ago. Unfortunately I could not get hold of it yet.

¹²¹ The change of the farm size must have happened around the 1960s/70s, as the farm areas map of 1966 still shows the old boundaries and farm names, whereas they were changed on the farm areas map of 1979.

¹²² I would like to thank the actual owner Johann Punt, living in South Africa, who gave permission to do so.

brief story on its history; an episode in Namibian history, as tiny as it may be, which deserves further consideration.

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