The Road of the Man Called Love and the Sack of Sero: The Herero-German War and the Export of Herero Labour to the South African Rand

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THE ROAD OF THE MAN CALLED LOVE AND THE SACK OF SERO: THE HERERO–GERMAN WAR AND THE EXPORT OF HERERO LABOUR TO THE SOUTH AFRICAN RAND*

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ON the morning of 12 January 1904, shooting started in Okahandja, a small town in German South West Africa, present-day Namibia. When the Herero–German war finally ended four years later, Herero society, as it had existed prior to 1904, had been completely destroyed. In the genocidal war which developed, the Herero were either killed in battle, lynched, shot or beaten to death upon capture, or driven to death in the waterless wastes that make up much of Namibia.[2] Within Namibia, the surviving Herero were deprived of their chiefs, prohibited from owing land and cattle, and prevented from practising their own religion. Herero survivors, the majority of whom were women and children, were incarcerated in prison camps and put to work as forced labourers for the German military and settlers.[3]

Over the years there have been a fair number of works dealing with the causes and effects of the Herero–German war of 1904–8. It has been argued that the loss of land, water, cattle and liberty, coupled with the activities of unscrupulous traders and German colonial officials, steered the Herero into launching a carefully planned, countrywide insurrection against German colonial rule.[4] In brief, 'in 1904, the Herero, feeling the cumulative and

* An earlier version of this article was presented at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the African Studies Association. The paper builds on insights gained during the writing of my Ph.D. thesis, '*Towards redemption: A socio-political history of the Herero of Namibia between 1890 and 1923*' (Leiden, 1996).

[1] I would like to thank the Office of the President of the Republic of Botswana for granting me permission to conduct field research between 1991 and 1993, R. Ross, K. K. Kaotozu and two anonymous *Journal of African History* readers for their comments and criticisms, and the Netherlands Foundation for Tropical Research (WOTRO) and the German Research Foundation (SFB 389) for research funding.

[2] The most accessible and detailed military history of the war is undoubtedly Gerhardus Pool, *Die Herero-Opstand 1904–1907* (Cape Town, 1979). Less detailed but a solid introduction in English is J. M. Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros* (Berkeley, 1981). Recently, there have been attempts to downplay the severity of the war, most notably by Brigitte Lau, 'Uncertain certainties: The Herero–German war of 1904', *Mibagus*, 2 (Apr. 1989), 4–8. For counters to Lau, see Tilman Dedering, 'The German–Herero-War of 1904: Revisionism of genocide or imaginary historiography?', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 19 (1993), 80–8; also, Jan-Bart Gewald, 'The great general of the Kaiser', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 26 (1994), 67–76.

[3] For an overview of the impact of the war on Herero society, see Gewald, 'Redemption', chs. 5–6; and 'Forced labour in the *Onjembo*: The Herero–German war of 1904–1908', *Itenarario*, 19 (1995), 97–104.

[4] For a discussion of the causes of the war in English, see Helmut Bley, *South West Africa under German Rule, 1894–1914*, (London, 1971), 133–43; Bridgman, 'Revolt'; Horst Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting* (Berlin, 1966); Manfred M. Deckert, 'The causes

bitter effects of colonial rule in South West Africa, took advantage of the withdrawal of German troops from central Hereroland... and revolted'.[5]

While agreeing that the Herero were adversely affected by German colonialism, Helmut Bley has argued that the war was not so much caused by actual losses, as by Herero perceptions:

> German expansion would never stop, and that the German government would not honour its protection treaties.... Their actual losses of land were less significant than the fact that the Herero head-men felt the position and future of their tribe to be threatened.[6]

Though Bley's words were in print in the late 1960s, to date there are no studies based on Herero oral testimony, which deal with the origins of the war or detail Herero views regarding the origins of the war.[7] Had there been such research, it is possible that there would have been mention of the recruiting drives of the Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), as well as of the export of labour to the Rand, as one of the possible causes of the war.

For Herero oral historians, *Ondjira ja Korusuvero* ('The Road of Love') which refers to the export of labour to the South African mines, is central to their understanding of the origins of the war. Similarly, for such historians living in north-western Botswana, *Ekutu ra Sero* ('The Sack of Sero') refers

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of the Herero uprising of 1904–1906', in Andrew W. Cordier (ed.), *Columbia Essays in International Affairs*, (New York, 1966), 255–7; Gerhardus Pool, *Samuel Maharero*, (Windhoek, 1991), 181–201; Arnold Valentin Wallenkampf, *The Herero Rebellion in South West Africa*, (Los Angeles, 1969). For the war as a nationalist response to German colonialism, see Neville Alexander, 'The Namibian war of anti-colonial resistance, 1904–1907', *Namibian Review Publications*, 2 (1988), 21–9; and John Iliffe, 'The Herero and Nama risings: South West Africa, 1904–1907', in G. Kibodya (ed.), *Aspects of South African History*, (Dar es Salaam, 1968), 95–111. For the official German High Command view of the war, see *Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika, bearbeitet nach angaben der Kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung I des Grossen Generalstabes: Erster Band Der Feldzug gegen die Hereros*, (Berlin, 1906–8). For the views of German combatants, see G. Auer, *In Südwestafrika gegen die Hereros: Nach den Kriegs-Tagebüchern des Obermatrosen G. Auer*, bearbeitet von M. Unterbeck (2nd ed., Berlin, 1911) and C. Rust, *Krieg und Frieden im Hererolande, Aufzeichnungen aus dem Kriegsjahre 1904* (Berlin, 1905).

[5] A. Adu Boahen (ed.), *UNESCO General History of Africa. Vol. VII: Africa under Colonial Domination, 1880–1935*, (Paris, 1990), 106.

[6] Bley, *South West Africa*, 143. In keeping with a view that the war was started because of Herero perceptions, see Gert Sudholt, *Die Deutsche Eingeborenenpolitik in Südwestafrika: Von den Anfängen bis 1904*, (Hildesheim 1975), 174–5. For an English summary of Sudholt's views, see Karla Poewe, *The Namibian Herero: A History of their Psychosocial Disintegration and Survival*, (Lewiston, 1985), 56.

[7] In respect of Herero views of the war and its aftermath, see Kirsten Alnaes, 'Oral tradition and identity: The Herero in Botswana', in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 11 (1981), 15–23, and 'Living with the past: The songs of the Herero in Botswana', *Africa*, 49 (1989), 267–99. Gesine Krüger, '*Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewusstsein. Zur Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs, 1904–1907*', (Ph.D. thesis, Hannover, 1995), though not based on Herero oral histories, deals in part with Herero accounts of the war, but does not include Herero views on the origins of the war.

to labour recruitment to the mines of South Africa, as well as to social circumstances in the immediate aftermath of the Herero–German war.[8]

This article suggests how oral histories can retain memories of important aspects of the past which have been totally ignored in contemporaneous accounts, or overlooked in texts based on archival research. Informed by these oral histories, this article discusses the validity of the arguments presented, and supplements these oral histories by presenting an account of 'The Road to Love' and 'The Sack of Sero' based on archival material.

THE ROAD OF LOVE

It was quite by accident, while conducting fieldwork in north-eastern Namibia in December 1991, that I first stumbled across *Ondjira ja Korusuvero*, 'The Road of Love'. Conducting interviews in the Okakarara area of north-eastern Namibia, I asked for information relating to the background and origins of the Herero–German war of 1904–8. It was during the course of one of these sessions that one of my informants referred to *Ondjira ja Korusuvero*, and the centrality of this concept to an understanding of the origins of the war.[9] At first, I had absolutely no idea what he meant. *Ondjira ja Korusuvero* can be translated as 'The Road of Love', or rather 'The Road of the Man called Love'. Yet this in itself provides no explanation of the meaning of the phrase. According to my informants, *Ondjira ja Korusuvero* was part of a German plot to destabilize Herero society prior to, and in preparation for, the Herero–German war. They stated that following the visitation of the *pesa*, the rinderpest epidemic which many believed had been engineered by the Germans, the German authorities demanded the first-born males of every Herero family.[10] These sons would be sent to travel and, so the Herero were told, would return laden with goods and riches which would enable them to rebuild the cattle stocks which had been decimated in the *pesa*. Anxious to re-establish their herds, the Herero offered up their first-born sons. My informants concluded their histories by noting that, as planned by the German colonial authorities, Herero society, now

[8] Interviews were conducted with two groups of people, firstly individuals who may not have been very knowledgeable about the broader past, but who, by virtue of their hospitality, were prepared to talk about their own background; and secondly, people who were recognized, pointed out and introduced to me by members of broader Herero society as people who were known to be particularly knowledgeable about the past: that is, their communities acknowledged them to be historians. I refer to these individuals as oral historians. In all cases, these were high-ranking members of the *Otruppe*, an amorphous, broadly based cultural organization, centred around a number of distinct flags, which seeks to maintain and perpetuate that which is considered to be in the interest of Herero society. For more on the *Otruppe*, see A. A. B. Hendrickson, 'Historical idioms of identity representation among the Ovaherero in southern Africa', (Ph.D. thesis, New York University, 1992) and W. Werner, '"Playing Soldiers": The Truppenspieler Movement among the Herero of Namibia, 1915 to ca. 1945', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21 (1990), 476–502.

[9] Interviews conducted at the homestead of Mr Javee G. Kangumine in Otumborombonga, Namibia, 9–10 Dec. 1991.

[10] For an overview of the rinderpest epidemic and its impact on Herero society, see Gewald, 'Redemption', ch. 4.

without a large section of its young adult male population, was weakened and was thus vulnerable when the German authorities decided to wage war on the Herero in early 1904.[11]

Unfortunately, my informants were unable to tell me what had happened to the sons who had walked the 'road of love'. They appeared to have disappeared. That is, until I conducted an interview with a man who during the 1960s had slipped across the border and into exile in Botswana. There he had been arrested by a policeman who carried a Herero name but was unable to speak Otjiherero. During the course of his incarceration, my informant found ample time to talk to the policeman with the Herero name. The policeman told him that his grandfather had come from Namibia to work on the mines of the Rand, but that he had been unable to return to his country. As a consequence, he had settled in South Africa and had moved with his family to Botswana following 'Hitler's war'.[12] Here, then, was a son of the 'road of love'.

Back in the archives, I was soon able to find ample material relating to the 'road of love', and even to earlier phases of labour export from central Namibia.[13] Prior to the imposition of German colonial rule, central and southern Namibia were part and parcel of an integrated trading region that encompassed all of south-western Africa.[14] For example, in 1836, James Alexander, guided by Khoi traders, travelled overland by ox-wagon from Cape Town to central Namibia. Here, after observing 'fine Damara boys, carried off by Namaquas in northern forays', Alexander bought a boy of about nine years old for the princely sum of two cloth handkerchiefs and two strings of glass beads.[15] In the 1860s, parliament in Cape Town debated what was to be done about 'Damara' bandits, who had crossed over into the northern Cape.[16] A short while later, other migrants from Namibia sought work at the diamond mines at Kimberley.[17] Similarly, the mines of the Northern Cape at Okiep and Springbok employed substantial numbers of

[11] Interviews conducted at the homestead of Mr Javee G. Kangumine in Otumborombonga, Namibia, 9–10 Dec. 1991.

[12] Interview with Mr Zebedeus Hawarwa, Otumborombonga, Namibia, 9 Dec. 1991.

[13] J. B. Gewald, 'Untapped sources: Slave exports from southern and central Namibia up to the mid-nineteenth century', in C. Hamilton (ed.), *The Mfecane Aftermath*, (Johannesburg, 1995).

[14] This is well illustrated in the work of Tilman Dedering, 'Khoikhoi and missionaries in early nineteenth-century southern Namibia: Social change in a frontier zone', *Kleio*, XXII (1990), 24–41; and *Hate the Old and Follow the New: Khoekhoe and Missionaries in Early Nineteenth-Century Namibia*, (Stuttgart, 1997).

[15] J. E. Alexander, *Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa*, (London, 1838), I, 221–3. The boy, Saul Sheppard, was later educated at Woolwich, and acted as secretary and scribe to the Herero chiefs of Okahandja.

[16] *Message from H.E. The Governor to the House of Assembly, transmitting Correspondence relative to Immigration of Damaras into Bushmanland*, (Cape Town, 1867), 2. This mentions the presence of numerous 'Damara' in the northern Cape, where some had been seeking employment on farms and mines. From about 1866 onwards, a community of 400–500 gathered near Pella under a certain Katchipca. The community came to light in the mid-1860s when settlers in the Namaqualand district began complaining of cattle thefts by gangs of well-armed Damara.

[17] William H. Worger, 'The making of a monopoly: Kimberley and the South African diamond industry, 1870–95', (Ph.D. thesis, Yale University, 1982), 71.

people described as being 'Damara'.[18] In the 1880s and early 1890s, the chiefs of Omaruru in western Namibia were involved in the routine export of indentured labour via Walvis Bay to the Cape Colony.[19] Indeed, missionaries who had worked amongst Nama/Dama speakers in Namibia were engaged in preaching to 'Damara' communities in the Western Cape.[20]

Following the formal imposition of German colonial rule in Namibia, the colonial authorities enacted legislation which sought to regulate the export of labour, and to bring it wholly within the control of the new colonial administration. Henceforth, anybody seeking to export labour from Namibia would have to pass through the channels of German bureaucracy. It is within the detritus left behind by this bureaucracy, that references are to be found relating to a Mr Alex Hewitt, and what my Herero informants referred to as the 'road of love'.[21]

With the ending of the Anglo–Boer War in South Africa, the Transvaal Gold Mines were soon back in production, demanding and devouring cheap labour. The newly established Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA), which had been set up to appease the voracious appetite of the mines, recruited labour throughout southern and central Africa. Following lengthy negotiations with the German colonial government, WNLA was granted permission to recruit in German South West Africa. In exchange, the WNLA had to fulfil a number of conditions. The most important of these was that the WNLA had to ensure that the Transvaal cattle markets were opened to cattle exported from German South West Africa, and that 20 marks had to be paid to the German authorities for every labourer exported.[22]

[18] Undoubtedly, the most illustrious of these people was Jakob Marengo, who was born in southern Namibia, grew up in the northern Cape, engaged in guerrilla war against the German army in southern Namibia and was shot by British police in the northern Cape. For an easily accessible account of this part of his life, see J. R. Masson, 'A fragment of colonial history: The killing of Jakob Marengo', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 21 (1995), 247–56. For further information on a community of Herero descendants in the northern Cape, see A. Zaby, *Die Riemvasmaker : Geschichte und Kultur einer Gemeinschaft* (Windhoek, 1982).

[19] For further details on the export of labour from western Namibia via Walvis Bay to the Cape Colony, see Gewald, 'Redemption', 78–81 and 'On being Damara between 1893 and 1993', paper presented at the Khoisan studies conference, Tutzing 11–14 July 1994, in *Quellen zur Khoisan-Forschung/Research in Khoisan Studies* (Cologne, 1998).

[20] Cape Archives Depot (CAD), Public Works Department (PWD), Vol. 2/8/20, *Aided Immigration : Introduction of Natives from Damaraland and St. Helena*, 1891–1893; PWD 2/70 and Native Affairs (NA), Vol. 285–93, *Letters received from Damaraland and Walfish Bay*, 1884–1891. United Evangelical Mission Archives in Wuppertal (UEMA), 1.594, Letters Rev Brincker in Otjimbingwe to Rhenish Missionary Society 24 June 1882 and 21 Sept. 1882. Until at least the 1960s, the term Damara was synonymous with the term Herero in most of British-administered southern Africa.

[21] See Namibian national archives in Windhoek (NNAW), Bezirksamt Swakopmund, (BSW) 74, (Old notation SD 61–172), Akten E1i, *Ausfuhr von Eingeborenen Besonderes*; also, BSW 7. Federal state archives in Potsdam (PTS), Reichskolonial Amt (RKA) 10.01 1225, *Auswanderung von Eingeborenen aus Sudwestafrika vom juni 1901 bis februar 1902*; and RKA 10.01 1227, *Arbeiterfrage Südwest Afrika*, vom 8 Aug. 1893 bis 19 Jan. 1904.

[22] NNAW, BSW 7, E 1 bd 1, Gouvernement Verordenung 30 Nov. 1902; Barlow Rand Archives, Johannesburg (BRA), H. Eckstein and Co. (HE), Record Dept, Witwatersrand Native Labour Association, Ltd (WNLA), File 251 W, nos. 19–38, 1904 May 18–1905 Jan. 5, cont. as File 247.

In early 1903, Alex Hewitt took up employment (at the astronomical salary of £50 a month plus expenses) as the WNLA's labour recruiter in German South West Africa.[23] Working in alliance with some of the local colonial officials, one of whom referred to Hewitt as 'my friend the slave trader', he began in September 1903 to recruit throughout much of central Namibia.[24] Recruits were rounded up and placed in collection camps set up at Omaruru, Karibib, and the Sney River.[25] From these camps they were transported to Swakopmund, where they were placed on to the ships of the Woermann Linie and exported to Cape Town.[26] From Cape Town, the recruits travelled by rail to the mines of the Rand. In this manner, and in the short period of just under three months, Hewitt exported no fewer than 625 recruits by sea from Swakopmund.[27]

Hewitt's successful recruiting activities in Namibia were cut short by the outbreak of the Herero–German war in January of 1904. He was nonetheless able to make one more substantial shipment of people from the Namibian coast. With the outbreak of the war, the panicked German authorities in Swakopmund ordered that all the Herero who happened to be living in Swakopmund at the time, as well as all those captured along the railway line towards Karibib, were to be incarcerated.[28] While the women were concentrated on land under guard, approximately 550 men were placed in the ships SS Eduard Bohlen and SS Helene Woermann, then lying at anchor off the coast at Swakopmund.[29] Crammed with prisoners, the ships could not be used for other purposes. This was a problem of which the German magistrate was aware:

> The post for Cape Town was due on the 19th [January], for this purpose the 'Eduard', which was loaded with 370 Hereros, would have to be cleared, without the homeward-bound 'Helene', which was occupied by 172 Hereros, being able to take them on board. The question now presented itself, what should happen with these people. Then it came to me, Mr Hewitt.[30]

[23] BRA, HE, WNLA, File 251 W: Report of Members of the Board of Management to be presented to Members at the First Ordinary General Meeting to be held in the Council Chamber of the Chamber of Mines, on the 31st. day of March, 1903, at 3.00 pm.

[24] NNAW, Accessions, A. 560, *Tagebuch Victor Franke*, entry for 29 Nov. 1903.

[25] NNAW, BSW 7, f. 36, Zürn in Okahandja, 9 Sept. 1903, to Kaisl. Distriktsamt Windhuk.

[26] NNAW, BSW 7, embarkation contracts, 24 Sept. 1903; 19 Oct. 1903 and 20 Dec. 1903.

[27] NNAW, BSW 74, *Akten Eli, Ausfuhr Eingeborenen Besonderes*, contains lists of recruits and sailing dates of the ships: SS Ingrid, 22 Sept. 1903, 200 recruits; SS Ingrid, 19 Oct. 1903, 171 recruits; and SS Eduard Bohlen, 20 Dec. 1903, 254 recruits.

[28] This is not to deny that there were Herero who collaborated with the Germans. One such person was Joseph Hameba who lived in the vicinity of Gobabis in the east of the territory. On account of his and his followers' involvement in transport riding for the German military, he was granted land. However, relations between Joseph and the Germans soured and in 1914 he and his followers sought asylum in the Bechuanaland Protectorate: BNA, RC 10/18, British consulate for GSWA in Luderitzbucht, 29 June 1914, to Secretary for Native Affairs, Cape Town; NNAW, SWAA 2081, A 460/5 Gobabis 1918–1951, Report on working of Native Locations Gobabis, 1918.

[29] NNAW, BSW 7, Magistrate in Swakopmund to Imperial Government, Windhoek 12 Feb. 1904.

[30] NNAW, BSW 7, Magistrate in Swakopmund to Imperial Government, Windhoek, 12 Feb. 1904. Author's translation.

After the magistrate had called together a gathering of Swakopmund's '*angesehener Bürger*' [respected citizens], the proposed transfer was given a gloss of legality. Hewitt gladly accepted the prisoners offered to him, but argued that as they were already embarked and at sea he did not need to pay customs duty. In the event, he did pay, and on 20 January 1904 the SS Eduard Bohlen with 282 prisoners on board set sail for Cape Town and the mines of the Rand.[31] The German consul in Cape Town later reported that of those unfortunates shipped to the Cape, 'six or seven children were to be found, of whom two suffered from a mild form of pox. One of the Natives only had one arm. The necessary clothing for the people needed to be issued in Cape Town.'[32]

While the Herero war raged, the recruiters were unable to work within the confines of German South West Africa and were forced to direct their attentions to the periphery of the war zone, more particularly to the British territories of the Bechuanaland Protectorate and Walvis Bay.[33] Following the military defeat of Herero forces at Hamakari in late 1904, the German authorities set up concentration camps in which they placed their prisoners: camps were set up in Windhoek, Karibib, Okahandja, Otjihanena, Brakwater, Swakopmund and elsewhere. The inmates of these camps were distributed, as forced labourers, among various settlers, businesses and military units.[34] A contemporary missionary painted a stark picture of conditions in one of these camps:

When ... [I] arrived in Swakopmund in 1905 there were very few Herero present. Shortly thereafter vast transports of prisoners of war arrived. They were placed behind double rows of barbed wire fencing, which surrounded all the buildings of the harbour department quarters [*Hafenamtswerft*], and housed in pathetic [*jammerlichen*] structures constructed out of simple sacking and planks, in such a manner that in one structure 30 to 50 people were forcd to stay without distinction as to age and sex. From early morning until late at night, on weekdays as well as

[31] NNAW, BSW 7, f. 110, Letter from Kaiserliches Bezirksamt Swakopmund to the Kaiserliche Gouvernement Windhuk, 12 Feb. 1904. This brought the total of men exported by Hewitt to the Cape by sea to 907, or just under 1 per cent of the total African labour force working on the Witwatersrand mines at the time: Peter Richardson and Jean Jacques van-Helten, 'Labour in the South African gold mining industry, 1886–1914', in Shula Marks and Richard Rathbone (eds.), *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa: African Class Formation, Culture and Consciousness, 1870–1930* (London, 1982).

[32] Quoted in NNAW, BSW 7, Foreign Office, Colonial department in Berlin to Imperial Government in Windhoek, 14 May 1904.

[33] At this stage Walvis Bay and its immediate environs was administered by the Cape Colony.

[34] Though the majority of the inmates of these camps were women and children, they were not treated as displaced non-combatant war refugees, which they were, but as *Kriegsgefangene*, prisoners of war. See NNAW, Zentrales Bureau (ZBU) 454, *Kriegsgefangene D.IV.e.3. Band I-3*; BSW 107, *Controle über Kriegsgefangene UA. 10/3/*: this lists all the Swakopmund prisoners of war and to whom they were distributed. It gives name, age, where occupied, where they came from, where they went, major misdemeanours and comments; BSW 48, XVII c *Kriegsgefangene*, deals with the distribution of prisoners of war among the civilian population of Swakopmund; Bezirksamt Luderitzbucht (BLU) 220. *Strafprozesssache gegen die hererofrau Anna*; BLU 221 SPS 85 *Herero Kriegsgefangene Justine entlaufen aus dem dienst*; Bezirksamt Windhuk (BWI) 406, *Akten E.V.8. Spec Kriegsgefangene Band I 1/2/1905 – 31/3/1906. E.V.8 Kriegsgefangene Antrage aber Uberweisungen, Band II 1/10/1905 – 30/6/1906*; Gewald, 'Forced Labour'.

on Sundays and holidays, they had to work under the clubs of raw overseers [*Knutteln roher Aufseher*], until they broke down [*zusammenbrachen*]. Added to this the food was extremely scarce: rice without any necessary additions was not enough to support their bodies, weakened by life in the field [as refugees] and used to the hot sun of the interior, from the cold and restless exertion of all their powers in the prison conditions of Swakopmund. Like cattle, hundreds were driven to death and like cattle they were buried. This opinion may appear hard or exaggerated. Lots changed and became milder during the course of the imprisonment... but chronicles should not suppress the fact that such remorseles rawness [*rucksichtslose Roheit*], lecherous sensuality [*geile Sinnlichkeit*] and brutish overlordship [*brutales Herrentum*] was to be found among the troops and civilians here as to make a full description hardly possible.[35]

In Windhoek, the capital of the territory, Herero prisoner-of-war labour was used in the building of the *Tintenpalast* [Ink Palace], which today houses the parliament of independent Namibia.[36] In Windhoek, too, a separate camp was created in which Herero women were kept specifically for the sexual gratification of German troops. As the missionary Wandres noted:

Of the free natives, no girl went there, so people resorted to the prisoner-of-war Herero girls, who of their free will accepted this dirty business. I personally doubt this free will... the kraal existed about 100 metres behind the fort.[37]

In contrast to the missionaries working in the camps, the missionary authorities, when informed of these activities, were – partly owing to their own convictions – unwilling to understand the extent of Herero oppression, suffering and abuse. Unable to comprehend that people, in a vain attempt to alleviate their condition, could be forced into prostitution, they drafted hypocritical letters of condemnation:

I was appalled by what you reported about the disgusting activities of the Herero women. Of course, one cannot really expect anything different from these people. Even if they become Christians, we cannot allow ourselves to forget the deep immoral dirt from which they have come. Again and again with our love and patience we must attempt to show them the disgusting and shameful aspects of their activities.[38]

The situation was no different in any of the other Namibian towns and villages where German forces were stationed.[39] Suffice to say that the impact and results of the wholesale rape of Herero women by German soldiers

[35] Archives of the Evangelical Church in Namibia in Windhoek (ELCIN), V. *Ortschroniken Swakopmund*. Author's translation.

[36] NNAW, ZBU 454, Leutwein in Windhoek, 12 Feb. 1905, to *Bauamt*.

[37] UEMA 1623, Wandres in Windjuk, 9 Sept. 1908, to inspektor, '*Von den freien Eingebornen ging kein Mädchen dort hin, man griff deshalb auf Kriegsgefangenen Herero Mädchen zurück, die sich freiwillig dem schmutzigen Geschäft apserten. Ich persönlich, bezweifle diese Freiwilligkeit... etwa 100 meter hinter der Feste bestand jener Kraal*'. Author's translation.

[38] ELCIN, VII 31 Swakopmund 1. Rhenish mission inspector Spiecker in Barmen, Germany, 26 Apr. 1905, to Vedder. Author's translation.

[39] UEMA, 1644a, *Personalakten*, August Kuhlmann, Band 1, f. 88–92, details extensive abuse of Herero prisoners in the territory. For further information regarding the question of German troops and sexual provision, as well as German colonial attitudes and race in German South West Africa, see Gewald, 'Redemption', 247–8, and Krüger, 'Kriegsbewältigung', 88–92, 109, 119–30, 153–5.

continued long after the formal ending of the war in 1908.[40] As a result of the abuse and oppression to which Herero prisoners of war were subjected, Hewitt and other labour recruiters were assured of a steady stream of refugees fleeing from German South West Africa.

As the war continued, large numbers of refugees fled to the comparative safety of the British territory of Walvis Bay. According to German intelligence reports, the postman operating between Swakopmund and Walvis Bay, acted as a go-between for recruiters in Walvis Bay and prisoners in Swakopmund.[41] Between 1905 and the beginning of April 1908, when the camps were finally abolished, hundreds of prisoners fled Swakopmund. Such was the scale of the exodus that the Woermann shipping company, a major recipient of forced labour, was often short of harbour labour. As a missionary working in Swakopmund at the time noted:

> Timotheus Hipangua, fled with wife and child and many others in the night of 4 November 1906 to Walvis Bay. Many had preceded him and many would follow him, to swap their toiling existence here for an existence of tedium in the mines of South Africa.[42]

Indeed, the flight of people from Namibia was on such a scale that, while they were pursuing their war against the Herero and Nama inhabitants of Namibia, the German colonial authorities were forced to import labour at vastly inflated prices from the eastern Cape.[43]

All sections of this now-destroyed Herero society were to be found among those who fled German South West Africa via Walvis Bay. One of the many to flee the country was the former chief of Omaruru, Michael Tjisiseta, who led more than 130 fellow prisoners in a breakout from the Swakopmund camp.[44] In contrast to the Herero royals, the majority of those shipped to

[40] As Herero informants told the member of parliament representing Calvinia constituency, W. P. Steenkamp, in 1922, 'In these villages and on these farms they [our wives and daughters] came in contact with immoral whites and soldiers, contacted gonorrhoea, and when after years they again were met by their husbands and fathers they were sterile. At Windhoek, a house of prostitution was opened for the German military. Our daughters were placed in it and when they returned from there and got married to Herero men, they were sterile... So keen were they to convince me that the Herero were not acquainted with that disease before white occupation that they quoted the example of those Herero who had fled with Samuel Maharero to Bechuanaland and Northern Transvaal. These were not sterile but on the contrary had large families.' W. P. Steenkamp, *Is the South-West African Herero Committing Race Suicide?* (Cape Town, 1923), 19.

[41] NNAW, BSW 107, (Old notation SD 68–204), *Entlaufen von Eingeborenen nach Walfischbay*, UA 10/2. In 1906, while collecting post in Swakopmund, the unfortunate man, who was an Ovambo employed by the British magistrate in Walvis Bay, was taken to be a 'workshy Herero', arrested, given twenty-five lashes and jailed. ELCIN, VII 31.5, Swakopmund, H. Vedder in Swakopmund, to Rhenish mission society in Barmen, 29 Dec. 1906. [42] ELCIN, V Chroniken 31 Swakopmund RMG, H. Vedder.

[43] For a clear, detailed and concise overview of this issue, see William Beinart, 'Cape workers in German South West Africa, 1904–1912: Patterns of migrancy and the closing of options on the Southern African labour market', in *The Societies of Southern Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1981). Unfortunately, no research has been done into what impact these migrants from the eastern Cape may have had on Herero survivors in Namibia.

[44] Following the Battle of Hamakari, Michael Tjisiseta, the chief of Omaruru, reached the Bechuanaland Protectorate. After staying there for a while, he returned to Namibia to collect his followers, who had been scattered by the war. In 1906, along with a party

South Africa were anonymous commoners. Typical of this majority were two boys, Jacko and Hans, who were taken to the Cape Colony to be indentured. On arrival at the Cape, the authorities considered them to be too young, and ordered the farmer, Phillipus Albertus Briers, to whom they were to be indentured, to declare why he believed the boys should be placed in his care. Briers, not about to let his catch slip away, declared:

I am a farmer and reside at Matjeskuil in this district. In consequence of information received I made application to the West Coast and Rand Native Labour agency, Cape Town, about April this year for two Damara boys. In October last I went to Cape Town and got two Damara boys named Jacko and Hans from the above agency. I paid the sum of four pounds ten shillings sterling to the agency for expenses incurred in bringing the boys to Cape Town from Walfish Bay. I paid this money to the agency by cheque on 30 October 1906 and hold a receipt for same. I was told at the offices of the agency to take the boys to the magistrate, Paarl, where proper contracts would be entered into. I was told by the man at the agency that the boys were not brothers and that they had no parents or relations here. The boys are now on my farm.[45]

Jacko and Hans, if those ever were their real names, exemplified the Herero who fled to Walvis Bay, and were then shipped on to the farms and mines of South Africa. In contrast, the majority of the Herero who fled Namibia and eventually ended up in South Africa, came overland by way of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, present day Botswana. It was on arriving in Botswana that a number of these refugees were confronted with the 'sack of Sero'.

THE SACK OF SERO

In conducting interviews amongst Otjiherero speakers in Ngamiland, in north-western Botswana, I came across the proverb *Ekutu ra Sero* ['The sack of Sero'].[46] People would caution, 'Do not immediately accept what a person gives you, for it might be the sack of the man called Sero'. My informants stated that those refugees of the Herero–German war who made it to the Bechuanaland Protectorate had had no food and were starving. Shortly after their arrival, a white man named Sero came into their midst. He had bags of rice and sugar, and people were allowed to eat as much as they wanted. However, once the food was finished Sero would say, 'You have eaten all my food, now you must pay me'. Of course the people could not pay: they had absolutely nothing. Then Sero would threaten them and say that if the men

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of 198, Tjisiseta boarded a ship in Walvis Bay and travelled to the Cape: Gewald, 'Redemption', 212.

[45] CAD, AG 1733, Jacko and Hans, Damara Boys. Brought from West coast for indentureship to farmers. Walfish Bay 1906–1907. Briers was not alone in his demand for children from the war zone. In 1904, a Cape resident, S. W. Mountain, wrote the following to the authorities in Windhoek: 'I do not know if among the natives your troops are capturing, there may be some orphaned children and if your government are willing to indenture one to me, should you be doing such things, I should very much like to have a Herero girl child about eight years old but not over.' Cited in Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*, 149.

[46] Findings based on this research were presented in Gewald, 'Seeking to return? Herero exiles 1904–1923', presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association, Toronto, 3–6 Nov. 1994.

did not go on contract and work for him in the mines, he would have them imprisoned. As one of my informants concluded, 'people... saw that eating this food was tantamount to tying together one's feet or killing a person and putting his or her head in a bag.'[47]

Shortly after the arrival of the first Herero refugees in northwestern Bechuanaland, the WNLA applied to the British authorities to lift their ban on the export of labour from this area of the protectorate.[48] Not surprisingly, the colonial authorities, faced with an unprecedented influx of refugees, immediately lifted the ban. During 1905, there were at least three labour recruiters operating in Ngamiland alone. Of the three, J. W. Clarke, who spent the greater part of 1905 scouring Ngamiland for Herero labour, received complete co-operation from British colonial officials.[49] It is probable that Clarke, who was accompanied on his forays by members of the Protectorate police, is the 'Sero' of oral history.[50]

In small batches of fifteen to twenty men, the recruits were sent down, on foot, to the Transvaal and the mines. They passed through a number of staging posts, which were usually small trade-stores working in alliance with the recruiters. The desperate condition of the recruits is clearly indicated by the following. In August 1905, a trader who ran a staging post notified the police that a number of Clarke's recruits appeared to be infected with smallpox. Accordingly, the men would have had to be placed in quarantine, which would effectively mean they would no longer be able to work in the mines. On receiving the message, Police Corporal Hatton and his men hurried to the scene, only to find that the Herero had gone as soon as they had heard the police were sent for. The police did, though, come across others who reported of the infected that 'their chests are bad and they have high fever'.[51]

Apart from Sero, Herero oral histories in Ngamiland record that, following their flight to Bechuanaland, the Herero were once again visited by the man who loved people, *Korusuvero*. Shortly after recruiter Clarke had completed his stint in north-western Bechuanaland, he was replaced by Hewitt. Hewitt, like Clarke, received full co-operation from the British authorities and worked closely with the remaining Herero leaders in his recruiting drives. In April 1907, the governor of German South West Africa laid an official complaint before the British authorities in which he claimed:

Sergeant Webb,... together with an agent of the WNLA and the fugitive rebel chief Justus Kavizeri, arrived at Rietfontein in German territory, with the object of persuading the Herero living in the vicinity to cross over to the BP, from where they could then be sent to the TVL as mine labourers.

[47] Interviews conducted with Commissioner Ngate Hange in Maun, Botswana, on 23–24 Dec. 1992, and Mr Usiel Ketanga Kandapaera and Mr Katjikoro Kakero in Tororamuru, Botswana, 26–29 Dec. 1992.

[48] BNA, Resident Commissioner (RC).11/1 Hereros Correspondence No. 786 (A), High Commissioner Johannesburg to Resident Commissioner, Mafeking, 25 Jan. 1905.

[49] BRA, HE Record Dept, WNLA, File 247, Witwatersrand Native Labour Association Limited List of Employers, 15 Mar. 1905.

[50] BNA, R.C. 11/1 786 B. Letter, Resident Magistrate, Tsau, Lt Merry, to Resident Commissioner at Mafeking, 5 July 1905.

[51] BNA, District Commissioner Serowe (DCS) 43/9, Cpl Hatton, Rakops to District Commissioner Serowe, 13 Aug. 1905.

About 150 Hereros have been taken away by these means. It has further been reported... that shortly afterwards two Hereros from the concentration camp near Quagganai crossed the German border and took with them five native families from the Bushveld to British territory. Samuel Maharero and his son, Frederick, are said to have themselves been in Quagganai in order to give assistance in withdrawing their compatriots.[52]

It was a charge that Hewitt did not deny; in fact, in reply, he let it be known that he had recruited 200 and not 150 people.[53]

Forced to flee Namibia, and stripped of most of their wealth and power, a number of young Herero royals – Willy Maharero, Justus Kavizeri, Traugott Tjetjo, Kahaka Seu and Friedrich Maharero – sought to maintain and re-establish their positions of power by co-operating with labour recruiters operating among Herero refugees in Bechuanaland and on the eastern fringes of the Omaheke *sandfeld*. These chiefs, impoverished by the war, used force, and what remained of their former influence, to get Herero to go on contract in the mines.[54]

However, Hewitt's biggest catch was none other than the erstwhile paramount chief of the Herero, Samuel Maharero. After the battle of Hamakari, and the ensuing skirmishes along the Eiseb River, Samuel Maharero and a few of his closest followers managed to flee eastwards until they reached the pans at Nyae Nyae.[55] The area around Nyae Nyae fell within the usufruct range of the Batawana polity. Consequently, Samuel Maharero wrote the following letter to Sekgoma Letsholathebe, the Kgosi of the Batawana:

Nyainyai (Mogopa) 28 September 1904.
... I am in the Batawanas country. I am writing to tell you that I have been fighting with the Germans in my country. The Germans were my friends. They made me suffer so much by the manner in which they troubled me that I fought with them. *The beginning of the trouble was that I gave the English some boys to work at Johannesburg. This is the reason that they fought with me. An Englishman called Juda* [*Hewitt*] *knows this he was the man who came to get the boys.* I have been fighting for eight months and my ammunition is finished. As I have come into your country at Magopa I ask help from Queen Victoria. In olden times my father was friendly with the English government and on this account I come to the English government for succour and request permission to live in their country. I now ask you to have mercy on me and help me in my heavy trouble. Please reply to me. This is my prayer to you that I may follow those of my people who have gone before me till I get there. If you allow me I will leave here at once. Sir, I ask you to answer me as soon as possible.

[52] BNA, RC 11/2. No. J 786 C 16, Windhuk, O. Hintrager to the High Commissioner for British South Africa, 23 Apr. 1907.

[53] BNA, RC 11/2, No. J 786 C, 24 Resident Commissioner F. W. Panzera in Mafeking to High Commissioner in Johannesburg, 5 Oct. 1907.

[54] Gewald, *Redemption*, 253. See also report by *Distriktschef* Streitwolf, who travelled through Ngamiland in 1907 to report on the Herero living there. NNAW, ZBU 459, Streitwolf in Gobabis, 25 Dec. 1907, *Bericht über den Hereros von Ngamiland und in unserem Schutzgebeit*.

[55] Nyai Nyai has as many spellings as it has exact locations. Properly speaking, Nyai Nyai refers to a series of waters lying between Tsumkwe and Gam on the Namibian–Botswana border. Samuel's letter to Sekgoma indicates that he had arrived in Magopa, which presently lies in Botswana just across the border from Gam in Namibia.

I send my best greetings. I am the chief of the Damaras [Herero], Samuel Maharero.[56]

In response, Sekgoma Letsholathebe urged Samuel and his followers to give up the war and settle in his territory.[57] Henceforth Samuel and his small party of followers were in the unenviable position of being refugees with nothing to offer but their labour. After a short period in the Tawana capital, Tsau, Samuel and his followers were moved on to Makalamabedi on the Botletle River. Here 'Matabele' Wilson, a trader and labour recruiter for the British South Africa Company, found Samuel and his party in late 1905:

Conversation with these people reveals the fact that they consider the protection afforded by the British flag is not all they thought it would be. For a time, they were supplied with a bag of mealies per diem by the Protectorate Government, but they are not allowed firearms of any sort, and now the supply of mealies has been cut off. The Bechuanas employ a number of them as servants – for a paltry dole per day and a handful or two of kafir corn. When the writer saw them, they were suffering not a little from hunger. The Bechuanas resent the presence of these refugees in their midst. The Kafir doctors are predicting that murrain will visit the cattle as a result of their presence.[58]

Naturally, the labour recruiters sought to induce Samuel to supply labour to the South African mines. With nothing left, Samuel Maharero attempted to survive by making use of the contact referred to in his asylum application as Juda. Juda, as the British official who read Samuel's letter correctly noted in the margin, referred to the labour recruiter for the South African mines, Alex Hewitt.[59] In later years, Samuel Maharero described what happened:

After I had fought the Germans... [and] after the Government had received me, a white man named Jund [Hewitt] came to me at Tsau, Lake N'gami, and said to me 'I have been sent by the Government to you. The Government has given you ground on which you and your people will build.' But, Chief, this was an untruth. He was only getting me into trouble. He was referring to ground owned by Companies. And after I had left with him, he took me to the Transvaal and told me that it was a country of contracts and that I must send my people to work on contract at the Mines. Thereupon I began to send men to work on contract, and they died in large numbers.[60]

[56] BNA, RC.11/1, Correspondence regarding Hereros (and flight to Ngamiland after rebellion in German South West Africa). Samuel Maharero in Mogopa 28 Sept. 1904 to Resident Magistrate. This is a translation of an original letter written in Otjiherero to Sekgoma Letsholathebe. Author's italics added. Another copy of the letter addressed to Sekgoma is to be found in CAD, AG 1931.

[57] CAD, AG 1931, Mervyn G. Williams in Johannesburg to imperial secretary, 8 Feb. 1905.

[58] 'In Bechuanaland; Words by an Eye-witness', *The Bulawayo Chronicle*, 19 May 1906. Thanks to Barry Morton for drawing my attention to this source.

[59] BNA, RC.11/1, Samuel Maharero in Mogopa to Resident Magistrate, 28 Sept. 1904. In Afrikaans, a variant of which Samuel Maherero spoke, the word *Jood*, meaning 'Jew', is pronounced in exactly the same manner in which the name Hewitt is pronounced in English.

[60] NNAW, South West African Administration (SWAA) 2085, 460/25 Maharero, Vol. 1, copy of letter from Samuel Maharero to Resident Commissioner, 25 Feb. 1920. Samuel Maherero's view of events was later backed up by his son, Friedrich Maharero. See: 'Annex 3d. Question of South West Africa. Communications received by the Secretary

At some stage prior to the First World War, the opium addict, mystic, naturalist and manic-depressive Afrikaner writer, Eugene N. Marais, met Samuel Maharero and his followers in Groenfontein in the Transvaal, South Africa. Marais was most impressed with the Herero refugees, whom he described as black Afrikaners.

> Most of them could read and write – High-Dutch was the normal 'School language' and a form of Afrikaans the 'learned' language of speech. All wore European clothes; many lived in built houses and farmed as Afrikaners did.[61]

Marais spent many an afternoon chatting with the ageing and ailing Herero chief and his confidant, the preacher–teacher, Julius Kauraisa. Yet, however idyllic the Herero position may have appeared to Marais, life in the Transvaal was not all that it seemed. Samuel and his few remaining followers were caught in a double bind. They were only permitted to live on the land on condition that they supplied labour to the mines and farms of the Anglo-French Land Company.[62]

Conditions on the Transvaal mines were and are difficult, alienating and extremely dangerous. Informants referred to the mines in terms of rocks biting and eating the life and limb of their male relatives, likening them to insatiable carnivorous animals.[63] Mining company figures indicate that in 1905 mine workers who came from German South West Africa had more than a one in ten chance of dying during their contracts; this was the fourth highest mortality rate among mine labourers according to origin.[64] In addition, Herero migrants had no security should they return to Namibia. Towards the end of 1905, when the first two-year contracts concluded by Hewitt were about to expire, it became clear that all the Herero contractees were refusing to return to Namibia. Doubtless informed as to what had been happening there by Herero who had fled the territory, they were convinced that they, too, would be imprisoned if they chose to return.[65] Though the German government attempted to bully the WNLA into returning the Herero, they were unsuccessful as the men chose to extend their contracts

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General: Memorandum on SWA by the Rev. Michael Scott', in *United Nations General Assembly : Official records of the second session of the General Assembly 4th Committee* (New York, 1947), 160. That Hewitt consciously lied to Samuel Maharero is substantiated by the writings of A. Loton Ridger, who accompanied Hewitt on his trip to the Herero: A. Loton Ridger, *A Wanderer's Trail: Being a Faithful Record of Travel in Many Lands* (New York, 1914), 282–9.

[61] Eugene N. Marais, *Sketse uit die Lewe van Mens en Dier* (Kaapstad, 1928), 3. Author's translation. Thanks to R. Gordon for the reference and to G. Krüger for the photocopy.

[62] NNAW, ZBU 459, *Extract from Minutes of a Meeting of Directors of the Anglo-French Land Company of the Transvaal, held on Wednesday the 8th of May, 1907.*

[63] Interviews conducted with Mrs Vinderine Kavi Muvangua Brown and Mrs Inaa Miti Magdalena Kanaimba, in Gabane, Botswana, 17 Dec. 1992; and Mrs Estere Mukaati Munjazo in Lentswe Letau, Botswana, 18 Dec. 1992.

[64] BRA, HE 290, WNLA 247, WNLA, to Sir Percy Fitzpatrick, Johannesburg, 17 Jan. 1906.

[65] NNAW, BSW 74, Reimer, German Consul in Pretoria, to German Governor in Windhoek, 6 July 1905.

rather than return to Namibia.[66] In the event a German investigation into Hereros living in the Transvaal concluded:

> In part it is the lack of funds, as well as the uncertainty, as to whether they will be able to return to German land, that drives them to continue concluding new contracts as mine labourers.[67]

Given the above, it is hardly surprising that people deserted or sought other means by which to come to terms with the position in which they found themselves in the Transvaal.

Very little is known about the Herero communities that emerged on the mines in South Africa, but it seems that Christianity was of particular importance for the maintenance and organization of a separate and specific Herero identity – particularly the tenets of Lutheran Protestantism taught by the missionaries of the Rhenish Missionary Society. This faith comes to the fore even in the cynical descriptions of the mine-labour recruiter Loton Ridger, who operated in Ngamiland:

> After our *Indaba* [meeting] was finished, some of the Damaras [Herero], now more cheerful at the prospect of soon reaching the lake and seeing their friends again, began to sing hymns taught them in their young days by German missionaries before they were expelled from their homes by the German soldiers. The irony of it! Taught the love of God by the German missionary, to be hunted down like rats by German soldiers![68]

Though Asser Mutjinde, who had been a mission evangelist and scribe to the chiefs of Omaruru, did not end up in the Transvaal, he, too, found great strength in his Lutheran beliefs. In 1905, Asser wrote to the missionaries in Omaruru from Nababes in Namaqualand, northern Cape. Mutjinde reported that, with about 250 Herero, he was working in the copper mines of Nababes. They had erected a school, were engaged in baptismal classes and had become affiliated to the Rhenish mission community in Concordia.[69]

One of my informants, Mrs Magdelina Kanaimba, told me of her life in Nigel in the Transvaal, where hers had been the only Herero family present. In Nigel, Mrs Kanaimba's father, an evangelist for Lutheran missionaries in German South West Africa, had worked at one of the mines as a first-aid orderly. Every Sunday, her father used to travel by train from Nigel, via Springs to Mayfair station, from where he would walk to the Crown Mines Herero location where he would preach from German psalm books and Bibles.[70] Throughout the early 1900s, the Rhenish missionary society received requests from the assorted preachers of the Transvaal for Herero Bibles and hymn books as well as proofs of the baptism and confirmation of Herero miners.[71]

[66] NNAW, BSW 74, Imperial German Consulate General in Cape Town, to Imperial magistrate in Swakopmund, 27 Oct. 1905. Interestingly, the few Ovambo workers who had been contracted chose to return to Namibia.

[67] NNAW, ZBU 459, *Auszügliche Abschrifgt zu J.Nr. 28176: Ueber Hereros in Transvaal*, 1907.

[68] Loton Ridger, *Wanderer*, 283.

[69] ELCIN, V. *Ortschroniken*, Omaruru 1905, f. 321.

[70] Interview conducted with Mrs Kanaimba in Gabane, Botswana, 17 Dec. 1992.

[71] See, for instance, ELCIN, I1-17A Letter from British and Foreign Bible Society in Cape Town to Rhenish missionary society in Wuppertal, asking for Herero Bibles, 21 Aug. 1905.

A very direct form of escape was desertion. Following the death, caused by pneumonia, bronchitis and injuries, of no fewer than fifteen Herero miners at the Lancaster mine, a South African newspaper reported that 'the whole of the natives from German South West Africa... struck work early this morning. The natives attempted to clear off in a body but a force of mounted police arrived from Krugersdorp and prevented them from doing so.'[72]

Similarly, once news of the outbreak of the Herero–German war reached the Rand in 1904, there were numerous cases of desertion. During its early stages, people attempted to return to Namibia, where they had hoped to join in the war against the Germans. The following dispatch, sent by a military magistrate stationed in northern Bechuanaland, indicates what the British authorities did with these deserters:

> I have several others who appear to have deserted from the mines and were making their way back to Damaraland. When told not to go, they expressed their determination to go at all costs. The result was that I arrested the lot of them and have kept them as prisoners (not in close confinement) and make them work at opening wells and doing things in general. They are now considerably sobered and have altered their minds.[73]

Oral histories mention these deserters who were prevented from returning to Namibia. Of these, Kaite Keratjike has taken on near mythical proportions in the oral histories being recounted today in north-western Botswana. Otherwise known as Mboiki (from the Afrikaans diminutive of 'boy'), Keratjike is credited with preserving Herero and specifically Mbanderu identity in exile.[74]

Prevented from returning to Namibia and with the military defeat of the Herero, most of the deserters and refugees settled as squatters and farm labourers in the northern Transvaal and south-eastern Botswana. After the Second World War, when South African agriculture became increasingly mechanized and racist land laws even more strictly enforced, the majority of Herero living in the Transvaal moved into south-eastern Botswana. At this stage, Namibia was still governed as an integral part of South Africa. As a result, the sons and daughters of the 'road to love' and the 'sack of Sero' were prevented from returning home.[75]

HEWITT, ZÜRN AND THE WAR

As noted earlier, oral historians contend that on account of the activities of 'Korusovero', Herero society was consciously weakened by the Germans to such an extent that Germany was able to successfully wage a war against the Herero. Although at first glance, this may appear to be a conflation of recruitment and German intentions which took place after the fact, a detailed

[72] PTS, RKA 1227, Arbeiterfrage Sudwest Afrika, *South African News* 27 Nov. 1903.

[73] BNA, RC 10/18, Resident magistrate, M. G. Williams in Tsau Ngamiland to Resident Commissioner 3 July 1904.

[74] Interview conducted in Tororamuru, Botswana, with Mr Usiel Ketanga Kandapaera, 28 Dec. 1992.

[75] NNAW, SWAA 2085/2086 A460/25 Maharero 1916–55; SWAA 1/1/3 CC4 Frederik Maharero: agreement signed by himself and others at Windhoek regarding his residence in SWA 1923; BNA, Damara S.126/3/1-2, Proposed emigration to South West Africa (and subsequent Damara/Batawana affairs).

look at the archival material shows that Herero oral histories may be more in keeping with the archival record than at first appears.

In 1904, shortly after the war had begun, Samuel Maharero wrote a letter to the governor of German South West Africa, Theodor Leutwein. In his letter, Samuel Maharero sought to explain the causes of the war and placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of Leutnant Zürn, the district magistrate in Okahandja.[76] A short while later, seeking refuge in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, Samuel Maharero wrote a letter to the British authorities in which he stated that the war had been started by the Germans because he supplied the 'English' with men for the mines of the Transvaal.[77] Samuel Maharero's contention that the Germans were opposed to the recruitment of men for the mines is born out by the archival record. In 1903, as Hewitt was collecting recruits in central Namibia, Zürn – the man whom Samuel Maharero blamed for initiating the war – lodged a complant, stating that he had not been informed of Hewitt's activities and indicating his clear opposition to them.[78] Zürn was not alone in his objections to Hewitt's work; indeed, he knew himself to be supported by colonial government policy. In late 1903, construction was begun on the Otavi railway line. On account of this, Governor Leutwein ordered that until such time as the *Otavibahn* had a full complement of labourers, no more Herero or Damara were to be recruited by Hewitt in central Namibia. Instead, Hewitt was to concentrate his attention on Ovamboland, which lay beyond the police zone of effective German control. In November 1903, however, German district officials at Kamumbonde reported that contrary to these instructions, Hewitt was recruiting labour in central Namibia.[79] In December 1903, less than a month before the outbreak of the Herero–German war, German officials in Karibib informed their counterparts in Swakopmund, where Hewitt's recruits were to embark, that Hewitt had concluded 110 contracts. However:

> the remaining contracts with natives who have been recruited after 31 October, are not to be recognized by us, as recruitment in Damaraland [central Namibia] has been prohibited by the Imperial Government from now on.[80]

Samuel Maharero received commission from Hewitt for his assistance in recruiting labourers for the mines.[81] Obviously, with the government ban on further recruitment in central Namibia, he was effectively cut off from this commission. Though the *Otavibahn* was intent on recruiting labour for work

[76] ELCIN, I 1.19 A. *Verschiedene Briefe von u a Samuel Maharero u a Herero 1887–1904*. Letter written in Otjiherero on Rhenish Missionary Society paper dated Otjozonjati, 6 Mar. 1904, signed by Samuel Maharero. The letter is not in Samuel's handwriting and it is probably a copy. Another copy in German exists. The Herero text has been used in this instance. Author's translation.

[77] BNA, RC.11/1, *Correspondence regarding Hereros (and flight to Ngamiland after rebellion in German South West Africa)*. Samuel Maharero in Mogopa to Resident Magistrate, 28 Sept. 1904.

[78] NNAW, BSW 7, Zürn in Okahandja, to Governor, 9 Sept. 1903.

[79] NNAW, BSW 7, *Distriktschef* station Kamumbonde, to Dr Fuchs Swakopmund, 19 Nov. 1903.

[80] NNAW, BSW 7, *Distriktschef* Karibib, to Imperial Magistrate Swakopmund, 17 Dec. 1903. Author's translation.

[81] NNAW, ZBU 459, folio 73, Hauptmann von Bosse in Windhoek, to Colonial Office, 23 Sept. 1907.

on the railway, it is unlikely that Maharero would have received similar commission, particularly as the recruitment would have been managed through the German colonial administration and would effectively have bypassed him. Instead, people such as Zürn, precisely those opposed to Hewitt, would have been in charge of the recruitment of labour in central Namibia.

In the week prior to the outbreak of the Herero–German war, Lt. Griebel, a representative of the *Otavibahngesellschaft* [Otavi railway company], arrived in Okahandja with the intention of recruiting Herero labourers for the Otavi railway. In Okahandja, Griebel was housed in the German military fort, which was under the command of Zürn. During the course of his stay in Okahandja, Griebel repeatedly tried to see Samuel Maharero, but was unable to meet the Herero chief. On the morning of 12 January 1904, no more than a few hours before the first shots were fired, Griebel left the fort and wandered over to the Herero location and Samuel Maharero's werft in the hope of holding meetings with Samuel and his councillors for the supply of labour; failing to find Maharero, Griebel turned back to the fort. Less than an hour later, the first shots of the war were fired.[82]

It is little wonder that Samuel Maharero, who had refused to have dealings with Griebel, came to see a link between the outbreak of war and his willingness to supply labour to Hewitt. Herero oral historians also see a direct connection between the supply of labour and the outbreak of the war, although their interpretation of events differs from that presented here. For them, Korusovero (Hewitt) has become conflated with German plans to annihilate the Herero, by taking young men out of the country and so weakening Herero society before war started. In Botswana, the 'Sack of Sero' is linked also to the export of labour, and provides us with information about the Herero refugees who made it to Ngamiland once the war had broken out.

Given this, it is striking that the issue of labour has been overlooked in all other explanations of the origins of the war, particularly as contemporary records suggests that the issue of labour recruitment was one that filled the colonial authorities with considerable unease.

Hewitt's activities in Namibia before the war were treated with great suspicion by the German authorities. Upon his arrival in German South West Africa the authorities had him shadowed and reports of his activities were drawn up.[83] When the war started and colonial officials were looking for a necessary scapegoat, their eyes do appear to have lighted upon Hewitt, and thus upon the issue of labour, albeit for a very short period. In early 1904, Hewitt actually claimed he had been arrested by the German authorities.[84] No German records of this have been found and it is doubtful if a formal arrest ever took place.[85] However, that Hewitt did claim to have been arrested, and the fact that other foreign nationals associated with labour

[82] *Deutsches Kolonialblatt: Amtsblatt für die Schutzgebiete des Deutschen Reichs, herausgegeben in der Kolonial-Abteilung des auswärtigen Amts*, (Berlin, 1904), 217.

[83] NNAW, BSW 7, Von Lindequist in Cape Town, to AA, 18 Aug. 1902.

[84] BNA, RC 10/18, Acting Imperial Secretary, to Resident Commissioner, 9 Mar. 1904.

[85] Particularly when one considers that after the war had broken out, the German authorities in Swakopmund presented Hewitt with 282 Herero for export to the Cape.

recruitment in the territory certainly were arrested, indicates that the authorities did initially blame labour recruiters for the outbreak of the war.[86]

In the aftermath of the Herero–German war, German colonial officials were very wary of labour recruiters. This was not so much because they might abscond with sorely-needed labour, but more out of fear that labour recruiters were potential fomenters of social unrest.[87] In 1908, the presence of a recruiter named Stan, operating in central Namibia for the mines in Kimberley, led the settler and colonial authorities to fears that another war was brewing.[88] However, beyond this circumstantial evidence, there is nothing to suggest that the German authorities seriously considered the issues of labour as one of the factors contributing to the outbreak of the war. The fact that the issue of labour recruitment is not mentioned in the official German government's inquiry into the causes of the war, probably means that the issue of labour came to be overlooked in all subsequent analyses.[89]

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that, in the case of Herero oral histories, the proverbs, *Ondjira ja Korusuvero* (The Road of Love), and *Ekuta ra Sero* (The Sack of Sero) draw the historian's attention to aspects of the Herero–German war that are completely overlooked in contemporary, as well as later, historical accounts of the war. Yet Herero oral histories offer a sophisticated analysis of why the war started, identifying German and South African hunger for labour as a causal factor. Though this article does not seek to argue that the Herero–German war was started solely by Lt. Zürn (intent on preventing the export of labour to the Rand), oral histories do indicate that the issue of labour recruitment contributed substantially to tension in central Namibia in early 1904. In other words, Herero oral histories draw our attention to a cause of the war that has hitherto been overlooked. Similarly, oral histories draw our attention to the role of labour recruiters amongst the Herero refugees in Ngamiland, and finally, they draw our attention to an aspect of Herero history not considered before: the existence of a substantial number of Herero exiles living in South Africa in 1904–48. Herero oral histories thus preserve aspects and analyses of the war and its aftermath overlooked by conventional historians of the Herero–German conflict.

[86] NNAW, STR 1, 1 a 4 *Gefangene während des Aufsandes* (*1904*). This deals with, amongst others, the Australian Stanley who was arrested by the Germans on suspicion of being a spy for the Hereros, and imprisoned upon SMS Habicht at Swakopmund.

[87] In 1907, Lt Streitwolf was sent across the border to report on the Herero refugees in Ngamiland. Among others, Streitwolf was instructed to report specifically on the activities of labour recruiters. NNAW, ZBU 459, *Hereroaufstand Politik*, D.IV.1.5., Lt. Streitwolf, *Bericht über den Hereros von Ngamilande und in unserem Schutzgebiet*, Gobabis, 2 Dec. 1907.

[88] NNAW, DOK 28, Report on labour agent Stan, 18 Feb. 1908, operating for Kimberley mines. District Magistrate in Okahandja, to Regional Magistrate in Windhoek, 18 Feb. 1908.

[89] For an overview of the commission of inquiry, as well as evidence supplied and called for, see NNAW, ZBU 450, *Feldzug gegen die Hereros 1904–1906 Weissbuch uber den Hereroaufstand 1904–1905*. It is apparent that when evidence came to be collected, labour was not considered an issue. Instead, as is indicated in a letter from the Foreign Office in Berlin, 21 July 1904, to Governor Leutwein, the spirits trade and his reserve policy were considered to be an issue.

SUMMARY

Herero oral historians recounting the Herero–German war of 1904–8, emphasize the importance of two events for an adequate understanding of the origins and aftermath of the war: *Ondjira ja Korusuvero* (The Road of Love) and *Ekutu ra Sero* (The Sack of Sero). Both refer to the recruitment and export of labour to the South African mines. 'The Road of Love' relates to the period immediately prior to the outbreak of the war, 'The Sack of Sero' to the immediate aftermath. The role of labour recruitment as a cause of the war has been completely overlooked in both contemporary and written historical accounts of the war. However, in Herero oral histories, labour recruitment for the South African mines is of crucial explanatory importance.

Such Herero oral histories draw attention to an aspect of Herero history that has hitherto been overlooked, namely the presence of a substantial number of Herero exiles living in South Africa between 1904 and 1948. Informed by these oral histories, this article presents archival material that substantiates Herero oral accounts of the origins and aftermath of the war. Though the article does not completely accept the arguments presented in oral accounts, it reflects something of the way in which oral histories can lead conventional historians to unanticipated, and otherwise unattainable, insights and perspectives about the origins and impact of the Herero–German war.