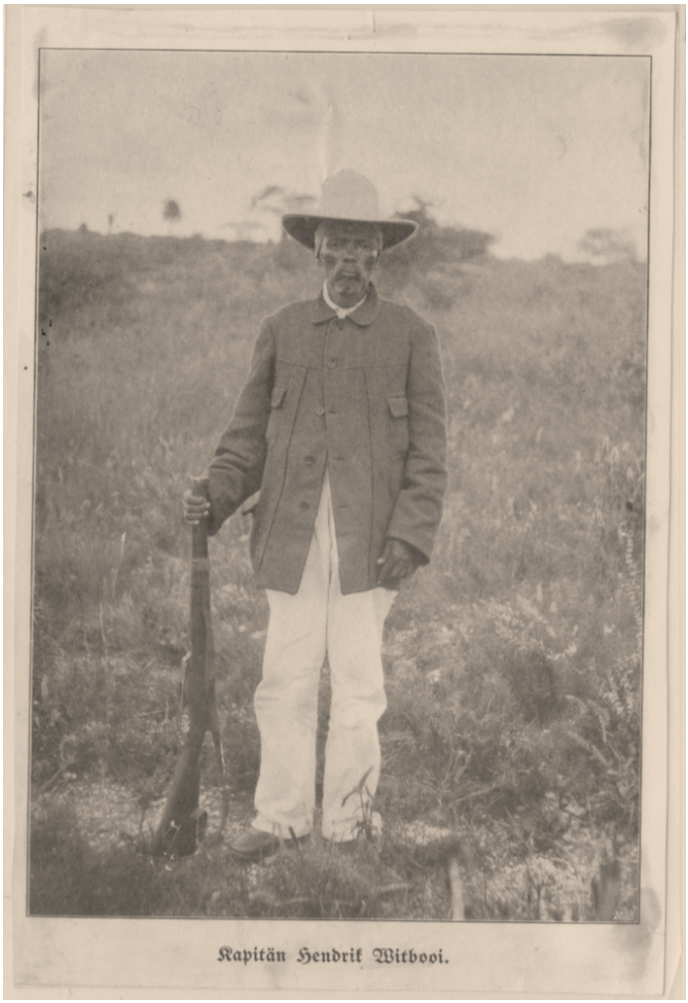
Three essays on Namibian history



Kapitän Hendrik Witbooi.

by Neville Alexander

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THE *Namibian Review: A Journal of Contemporary Namibian Affairs* has been published since November 1976. Initially it was produced by the Namibian Review Group (known as the Swedish Namibian Association) and 14 editions were printed by the end of 1978. It did not appear in 1979 as in that period we translocated ourselves from Stockholm to Windhoek – i.e. we returned home after 15 years in exile and we wrote directly for a political party, now defunct in all but name. The Namibian Review resumed publication in 1980 and has been appearing ever since with the latest edition devoting its leading article to a survey of Namibia at the beginning of 1983 and the most recent round of talks between the Administrator General and the 'internal parties' on (another) possible interim constitution.

In all this time the goals of the *Namibian Review* have remained unchanged i.e. we provide a forum for the discussion of all aspects of life in Namibia with particular emphasis on the problems confronting us in the long hard struggle towards independence and on the manner in which these can be solved. We encourage a free flow of ideas so that the leaders of tomorrow can prepare themselves, intellectually, for the tasks which will face them when they eventually take over the reins of power. The *Namibian Review* also fosters a spirit of national unity which should transcend party political boundaries.

This new series, Namibian Review Publications, is an extension of our work in this field. We have designed the Review, which appears every second or third month, so that the articles and essays in each edition cover as broad a political, economic, cultural, social and literary spectrum as

possible. However, this format makes it difficult for us to give an adequate coverage to those seminars held from time to time which focus on one single aspect of Namibian society, e.g. politics, history, education, agriculture or economics. Namibian Review Publications shall therefore reproduce, as far as this is possible, the lectures presented at these seminars, and each volume shall deal with one specific theme. The first four volumes of this series are as follows:

NUMBER 1: Three Essays on Namibian History by Neville Alexander

1. Jakob Marengo and Namibian History
2. Responses to German Rule in Namibia or the Enigma of the Khowesin
3. The Namibian War of Anti-Colonial Resistance, 1904–1907

NUMBER 2: The Seminar on Namibian History, Windhoek, December 1983

1. Namibia and Its Past: Does it Matter, Kenneth Abrahams
2. The Kommando and the 1860s Traders' and Missionaries' 'War of Liberation', Brigitte Lau
3. The Namibian War of Anti-Colonial Resistance, 1904–1907, Neville Alexander
4. Production and Land Policies in the Herero Reserves 1925–1950, Wolfgang Werner
5. South African Colonialism in Namibia, Keith Gottschalk
6. The Origin and Development of the Settler Bourgeoisie in Namibia, David Peters
7. Economic Competition between the Germans and South Africans in Namibia, Zedekia Ngavirue
8. A Workshop on Namibian History

NUMBER 3: 'Namibia Today': UCT Summer School, January 1983

1. Namibia Today: Between Economic Development and International Settlement, Wolfgang Thomas
2. Present Political Groupings and Prospects for Coalition,

Ottilié Abrahams
3. Obstacles to an Internal Settlement, Benjamin Africa
4. Prospects for an Internationally Recognised Settlement, Daniel Tjongarero
5. Namibia Today: The Key Issues, Moses Katjiuongua

NUMBER 4: The Dramatic Decline of the DTA, March 1983
1. A History of Deteriorating DTA-SA Relations, Leon Kok
2. The Present Impasse and the Alternative, Gerhard Tötemeyer
3. The DTA and the Crisis of Legitimacy, André du Pisani
4. A Re-Affirmation of our Principles, prepared by the DTA
5. Whither the DTA? Joseph Diescho
6. Lessons from the Defeat of the DTA, Kenneth Abrahams

The seminar organised by the Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town, held in August 1982, entitled 'Focus on Namibia' logically forms part of this series. The papers presented on that occasion, however, are being printed in a separate publication ('Perspectives on Namibia Past and Present'). These are:
'Aspects of Pre-Colonial Namibian History' by Brigitta Lau;
'Responses to German Rule' by Neville Alexander;
'South Africa in Nambia' by Keith Gottschalk;
'Namibia: Prospects for a Settlement' by André du Pisani; and
'Strategic Options in the Namibian Independence Dispute' by Ottilié Abrahams.

It is highly appropriate that the first edition of this new series should be devoted to some recent essays by our old friend and colleague, Dr Neville Edward Alexander. We have known him and worked together with him for nearly 30 years and we form part of that 'new generation, born in the battle for truth' which sprang up in the course of the struggle against the Bantu Education Act and the Separate

Universities Act.

His Curriculum Vitae reveals that he was born in Cradock, Cape Province on the 22nd October, 1936. After attending schools in Port Elizabeth and Cradock he matriculated in December, 1952. He received his higher education at the University of Cape Town between 1953–1958. His major subjects were German philology and History. After his BA degree (1956), he completed an MA in German (1957) and a BEd (1958). He spent the years 1959 to 1961 in the Federal Republic of Germany and was awarded a Dr Phil. in Tübingen (1961). The subject of his doctoral dissertation was: 'Studien zum Stilwandel im dramatischen Werk Gerhart Hauptmanns' (Studies in Style Change in the Dramatic Works of Gerhart Hauptmann). This was published in Stuttgart in 1964 by JB Metzlersche.

On his return to South Africa, Dr Alexander taught at the Wittebome and Livingstone High Schools between 1961 and July 1963 and was a part-time lecturer at the University of Cape Town during 1963. Since July 1979 he has been Director of the Cape Town Centre of the South African Committee for Higher Education. He is also an occasional and part-time lecturer in sociology at the University of Cape Town. He has numerous publications in German and English in the fields of German literature and Aesthetics, History, Political Science and Sociology.

Dr Alexander's political activities were confined largely to various organisations of the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM), chiefly the Teachers' League of South Africa (TLSA), The Society of Young Africa (SOYA) and the Cape Peninsula Students' Union (CPSU). He was a foundation member of the Yu Chi Chan Club (YCCC) (1961) and the National Liberation Front (NLF) (1962). He was arrested on the 12th July 1963 for his involvement with the YCCC and NLF and was charged with 10 comrades on 4th November, 1963 with conspiracy to commit sabotage. He was convicted on 15th April 1964 and sentenced to 10 years

imprisonment which he served on Robben Island. He was released on the 13th April 1974 and was kept under house arrest until the 30th April 1979.

These essays form part of a larger work, namely, an investigation into South West African history at the turn of the century with particular reference to the question of whether the Herero and Nama resistance to German colonial rule represented the beginnings of a genuine Namibian national consciousness or not. Because of the voluminous material available Dr Alexander intends to write three monographs, on Samuel Maherero, Hendrik Witbooi and Jakob Marengo, before turning to the main subject of his enquiry. Although these essays stand on their own, and may be read in this way, they should nevertheless be viewed as parts of the essential preparatory work to a fundamental examination of an extremely crucial period in our history.

JAKOB MARENGO AND NAMIBIAN HISTORY

THE SUCCESSFUL CONDUCT of unconventional warfare in Southern Africa and the intensifying civil war in South Africa itself have inevitably inspired a re-examination of early African resistance to the imposition of colonial rule in the subcontinent. Some important discoveries have been made recently by scholars of such diverse views as Terence Ranger, Allan and Barbara Isaacman, and Steinhart and Charles van Onselen, amongst others. One of the most exciting figures to emerge from under the mountain of dead hogs heaped upon the African past by imperialist apologetics, is Jakob Marengo.

The extent to which class position and dominant ideologies bias our perception of social development becomes manifest when one realises that Marengo, one of the pivotal characters of the great uprising of 1904–1907, is either not mentioned at all in the meagre historiography of Namibia or, if he is, then usually in terms of anti-social banditry, cattle-raiding or even in terms of terrorist gangsterism. Helmut Bley in his major work on *SWA under German Rule* mentions Marengo only once in passing; Goldblatt mentions him briefly but without discussing his significance in the uprising.

In the most recent work on the uprising published in South Africa in 1979, i.e. in Gerhardus Pool's *Die Herero Opstand 1904–1907*, Marengo is not mentioned at all.

Indeed, the position is much worse. Without exception, all the historians of Namibia as well as Uwe Timm in his recent novel, have continued to use the name Morenga instead of Marengo. Yet, with the exception of German colonial and military despatches, all the contemporary

documents refer to the man as Jakob Marengo or sometimes as Jakob Maringu or Marenka. His own son, Charles Marengo, put the matter beyond doubt in an interview arranged by Cristoph Borbowsky in about 1974. He vehemently corrected the interviewer who kept referring to his late father as Morenga, insisting that his name was Jakob Marengo. Historians, of course, know this process well : the main source for the military exploits of Marengo is vol. 2 of the *Battles of the German Troops in SWA*, subtitled *The Hottentot War*, which was published by the Grosser Generalstab's Military History Division in Berlin in 1907. In this work, Marengo is referred to incorrectly but consistently as Morenga. This usage has simply been taken over by one historian from the previous one. We have to begin our reassessment, therefore, by using the actual name of the historical subject. We have to retrieve the Bondelswarts, Marengo's people, from the kind of thinking that made it unproblematical for AM Davey to describe them as 'an obscure Hottentot tribe in SWA' in his essay on *The Bondelzwarts Affair of 1922*, published in 1961.

It should come as no surprise to us that besides the popular writings emanating from the ranks of SWAPO and near-SWAPO people, the only scholars who have recognised the importance of Jakob Marengo are two East German historians, Horst Drechsler and Heinrich Loth. Both of them have written extensively on South West Africa from the mid-19th century to the end of the German period, using mainly the jealously-guarded Imperial archives in Potsdam. Although they profess to be Marxists, their work is sometimes composed in the worst style of European Methodism, according to whose tenets the Africans were always right. Be that as it may, there is no doubt at all that the best empirical work on the history of Namibia has come not out of Namibia or out of South Africa or even out of West Germany but from behind the much condemned Berlin Wall. There is no doubt in my mind that this has as

much to do with the comradely relations existing between the German Democratic Republic and SWAPO as with the plenitude of the Potsdam archives.

Before I sketch in brief the historical background necessary for assessing the significance of Jakob Marengo, I should like to anticipate two likely criticisms of my approach. In the first place, it may well be said that by singling out Jakob Marengo I am perpetuating uncritically the elitist tendency of bourgeois historiography which often describes only the exploits of 'leaders' rather than the contribution of 'the people'. As you are no doubt aware, the debate is at present being conducted on this aspect of resistance historiography. For me, the most important aspect of this debate is the fact that it has been generated by the experience of and discussions within movements such as ZANU-PF and FRELIMO and that it has added point to the re-examination of sovereign pre-colonial African societies with a view amongst other things to establishing the degree and direction of social differentiation within them. What has become clear is the fact that in order to do this very much more field work is required. In particular, the oral traditions of the peoples concerned need to be collected before it is too late. After all, the historians of African resistance are fortunate insofar as they can actually still speak in rare cases to a few of the original participants or at least to their sons and daughters, people who can remember in some detail the stories they were told by the heroes and heroines of yesterday.

In regard to the great uprising in German SWA, I have initiated, on a small scale at present, the collection of such recollections and remains. Once this has been done, it will be much easier to write an account of the events from the point of view of 'the people' rather than of the elite. Jakob Marengo, in the absence of such a collection of traditions, is a particularly happy choice precisely because it is possible to infer from his acts and his statements as well as the

accounts of those written by others what the relationship between the leaders and people was. Indeed, it should be clear that to the extent that this debate tends to trap us into believing that we must write *either* from the perspective of the 'leaders' *or* from that of the undifferentiated 'people', it is a scholastic and misleading exercise. What is required is in each case to examine the relationship between people, strata and leadership. My point of view is similar to that of AB Davidson's in his paper 'African resistance and rebellion against the imposition of colonial rule' (1965) in which he reminded us that it is the people, not leaders who rose in rebellion against colonialism and that a ruler or a chief 'was able to bring out his people in rebellion only if the ideas had matured in their consciousness'.

There have been important developments since Terence Ranger wrote his article on 'The people in African resistance' in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* in 1977. Yet his agenda for resistance historiography remains largely valid even today:

> So far these proclaimed needs to re-examine resistance; *to analyse the classes and interests involved*; to distinguish resistance against invasion and loss of sovereignity from resistance to under-development or the intrusion of capitalist relations; to examine without romanticism the connection between primary resistance and modern liberation movements, so far all this has remained a matter of expectation rather than of performance ... We have not had a major study which successfully establishes itself as the base-line for a new resistance historiography (p133).

Which brings me to the second anticipated criticism, viz., the problem of continuist interpretations of African resistance and what has been called the myth of nationalism. It is my contention that Jakob Marengo represents precisely one of the main bridges between the

Namibian past and the Namibian present, between the so-called primary resistance movements against German colonial rule and the modern liberation movement led by SWAPO which is no longer simply anti-colonial but increasingly also anti-imperialist. I take the position on principle that there is no such thing as a discontinuous shift in the seamless web of history. As in the case of any continuum there are obviously qualitative differences between two relatively distant points on the continuum but these points are connected by quantitative increments of whatever constitutes the continuum. In social evolution where, because of the development of forces of production, new classes and new relations of production come into being, it may seem to be nonsensical and Aristotelian to speak of a continuum. Yet, there is clearly a sense in which the continuity of social development is compatible with the discontinuity of qualitatively different social relations at two different points in time.

The problem hitherto has been that African nationalist historians have made claims about connection between what was called primary resistance and modern mass nationalist movements as though the object of resistance as perceived by the resisting people and the motives of resistance were the same in the late 19th/early 20th century and in the post-1960 year. There is clearly a difference between peoples fighting for the restoration of land and sovereignity in order to restore the pre-colonial situation and a people fighting essentially for political independence, higher wages or democratic rights, all within the capitalist framework or, even for the abolition of capitalist exploitation. There is, to put it simply, a world of difference between the resistance to colonial encroachment put up by say, the AmaXhosa under Ndlambe or under Hintsa and the kind of struggle being waged by municipal workers in Johannesburg or by meat workers in Cape Town. This is

almost too obvious to have to be spelt out.

In fact, the allegation against nationalist historians is that they write anachronistically about early resistance movements. Edward Steinhart, in an article called 'The Nyangire rebellion in Bunyoro, 1907: Anti-colonial resistance and nationalism' (*Asian and African Studies* XII (1976) pp. 43–61) has pointed out the pitfalls of continuist and nationalist interpretations. One of these is the tendency to make anti-colonialism become synonymous with movements to expel the aliens and restore national independence even before a concept of the nation exists in the minds of the movement's members. To interpret African resistance as proto-nationalism when it is recognised to include protest against non-aliens for reasons which are independently generated or even hostile to ideals of national solidarity is an exercise in hindsight and historically unjustifiable.

These strictures are perfectly justified as directed against the romanticised historiography of African resistance. However, each case has to be considered concretely. I believe that a thorough study of the great uprising of 1904–1907 and of the role of men such as Marengo, Abraham Morris, Frederick Maharero, Simon Kopper and others, will demonstrate that in this instance we can indeed speak in terms of a proto-nationalism. To put it differently: the phase of 'primary resistance' can be said to have ended in the main with the defeat of the Witboois in 1894 and their acquiescence in German rule. The following period of ten years before the great uprising is one of chafing collaboration, armed resistance or withdrawal and even maroonage in the case of smaller groups of people. The great uprising, while marking for many groups and leaders a last act of desperation, itself inaugurates a period characterised by complex patterns of resistance at various levels in what was to become Namibia. It is in this latter aspect that the figure of Marengo looms large. Let us glance

briefly at the background.

We may begin by accepting the thesis of Drechsler and Loth that the content of 19th-century Namibian history at least for Central and Southern Namibia is defined by the struggles between the Nama and the Herero for hegemony in the creation of what they call an early feudal state. This development was short-circuited by the intervention of Rhenish missionaries and by German colonial aggression. Despite the fact that the Herero signed a treaty of protection with the Germans (in 1886) both the Herero and Nama ignored the German annexations until c.1892 when, on peace being declared, Germany decided to intervene by strengthening its troops in SWA. Hendrik Witbooi was the first of the indigenous chiefs to realise that a change had taken place. Already on 30 May 1890, he wrote the famous letter to Maharero in which he upbraided him for having accepted German protection and affording to a mighty power an opening through which it could dominate the affairs of Damaraland and Namaland. 'You will one day regret bitterly that you surrendered your land and sovereignity to the white people.' This letter was a major reason for the negotiation of the Peace Treaty of 1892 which is itself a benchmark in Namibian history, since it clearly placed the German colonial forces on one side against the African people on the other side. This contradiction remained the principal contradiction in GSWA until well after the crushing of the great uprising in 1907.

By eliminating the armed resistance of the Witboois in 1894, the German administration with one stroke altered the balance of power in GSWA. In a long series of wars between 1894 and 1897 against different indigenous groups, Leutwein carried out a textbook policy to divide and rule, isolating and crushing each revolt and gaining the collaboration of Herero and Nama, especially Witbooi, auxiliaries from time to time in the pacification of particular areas. Of great interest in this regard is the first occasion

when Herero and Nama fought together against the German colonialists. This took place in the 1896 revolt of the Mbanderus and the Khauas people. Leutwein had the leading chiefs executed in order to make a deterrent example.

Drechsler sees the collaborationist phase of Hendrik Witbooi and Samuel Maharero as 'errors'. There is, of course, a sense in which they were errors. But the point is surely that given the lack of an objective basis of unity at the time and the internal contradictions within each of the sovereignities, the collaborationist option was all that remained for them. With Hendrik Witbooi it is certain that his collaboration was a conservative rather than a reactionary strategy, at least in his own consciousness.

After the qualified Witbooi capitulation, Leutwein systematically dispossessed the Herero, choking them by means of 'boundary agreements', impounding their 'stray' cattle, and, in fact, perpetrating large-scale cattle theft. In particular, he was careful to cut them off from the Ovambo by means of a northern boundary and the creation of 'crown land' in the north, which would clearly be of great strategic value in case of a war against the Herero.

German settlement was encouraged at the same time and even though it was against Herero law, Leutwein allowed the settlers to buy land from bankrupt Herero chiefs. After every unsuccessful revolt, land and cattle were confiscated and the process of primitive accumulation speeded up. The Rinderpest of 1897 was a major cause of the precarious finances of the chiefs. Men like Samuel wasted the land by giving it away to settlers for next to nothing against the vehement protestations of sub-chiefs. It was these sub-chiefs who eventually constituted the vanguard of the uprising of 1904-1907. The Rinderpest decimated vast Herero herds, eliminated Herero competition against the settlers on the growing domestic and export market for beef and led to a sharp increase in the

price of meat. The dishonest transactions of traders and settlers combined with the Rinderpest reduced the Herero cattle herd to 50 000 by 1903. A narrow-gauge railway line from Swakopmund to Windhoek as well as a telegraph connection was built to facilitate transport and communication. This together with the above factors led to an insatiable demand for arable land. Some of the missionaries sensed the approaching catastrophe and propagated the creation of native reserves on the South African model pioneered by Dr Philip. For a number of reasons the colonial authority looked askance at this idea and deliberately took over the direction and slowed down the process of creating reserves. In the 1960s the Odendaal commission was to try under completely different circumstances to resuscitate the idea as part of the general policy of retribalisation.

There is no doubt about the fundamental causes of the uprising. The systematic dispossession of the Herero (and the Nama) as well as the rightlessness and lack of equality of the people vis-à-vis the settlers constituted the main sub-soil of the movement. The sub-chiefs, typified by Asa Riarua, constituted the vanguard of the movement, giving expression to the people's desperation. The land question (which includes the question of cattle) was central and the movement was clearly aimed at the restoration of the ancestral lands of the Herero. The building of the Otavi railway line was the last straw. Leutwein had cajoled Samuel Maharero into surrendering large blocks of land to the Otavi Mining Company which was building a railway line that ran diagonally through the heart of Hereroland. The Herero people realised that this spelt the end of their independence. One of the most touching elements in the uprising is the war-chant of the Herero women with which they are said to have spurred on their menfolk to resistance. Before and often during battles, they would shout: 'To whom does Hereroland belong? Hereroland belongs to us,

the people!'

Samuel tried to forge an alliance. The uprising had obviously been planned over a long period of time.

The actual timing of the uprising was determined by the last of the isolated revolts of the primary resistance phase, viz., the Bondelzwarts revolt of December 1903. The German Imperial troops were concentrated in the South in order to beat down this revolt so that the Herero were free to tackle isolated farmers and police posts. Their enemy was clearly defined as consisting of the German colonial rulers and German settlers. Women, children, missionaries, people of British and Dutch descent were to be left alone.

Here we meet Jakob Marengo for the first time in the German records. Much is usually made of the fact that he was of Herero-Nama parentage but this was nothing uncommon at this time. Of much greater interest is the fact that he had been working at the O'kiep mines as a labourer-clerk for some time before the Bondelzwarts revolt in December 1903. He had a mission school background and it seems fairly certain that he had actually lived in Germany with one of his missionary patrons for a period of 18 months. Marengo had a marvellous facility for languages and could speak English, German, Afrikaans, Herero and Nama fluently. He became one of the activist leaders of the 1903 revolt and attracted a large following of Bondelzwarts and other Nama-speaking families.

This is the first important difference between Marengo and almost all the other leaders of the great uprising. Whereas Maharero and Witbooi were traditional chiefs, Marengo came up from the ranks. Moreover, his was at the time a unique case in that he was of Herero descent but accepted by Nama-speaking people as their leader. Throughout his brief career he constantly strove to unite the different groups whom traditional and German strategies had kept apart for so long. At the height of the war, he had a following of more than 600 armed men drawn from both

sides of the Orange River and consisting of Nama and Herero peasants as well as of Xhosa-speaking and other workers from Namaqualand.

Again and again, we find Marengo intervening at crucial moments during the uprising. There is no doubt that it was his catalytic initiative in July/August 1904 that catapulted Witbooi into his decision to take up arms once again. Witbooi's vacillation on receiving the call from Samuel remains a thorny problem. Drechsler is hasty, I think, in blaming Witbooi for the defeat of the Herero on the grounds that if he had decided to take up arms earlier the whole of Namaland could have followed him and the Germans would have been unable to cope with the situation. A close reading of the sources indicates that between February and August 1904 Witbooi's strategy was extremely subtle. It is clear that he (a) did not trust the perseverance of Samuel and the Herero leaders and (b) he had to be sure that there was absolutely no other option. I contend, in fact, that Marengo helped him to make up his mind by opening the hostilities in the South just as the Herero were fighting their battle for survival at the Waterberg. (Ironically, Marengo had been outlawed by the Germans in January 1904 at the peace of Kalkfontein signed with the Bondelzwarts leaders because he had allegedly killed one of Hendrik Witbooi's nephews who had been fighting on the side of the Germans against the Bondels.)

Drechsler is doubly wrong because whereas the German Empire had well-nigh inexhaustible supplies over the longer term, the position of the Nama/Herero resisters could only get worse unless there was outside intervention. The Witbooi auxiliaries, according to the military despatches, evaded all combat with their Herero countrymen. They were never more than 100 men in all and Hendrik himself never led them in battle. A section of them finally deserted outright and advised Hendrik to join the struggle against the genocidal war waged by Germany

against the Africans.

There is enough reason to argue that the Witboois remained neutral in the first phase of the uprising until they had enough supplies, ammunition and intelligence in order to open up a second front. The turbulence among the Nama brought about by the uprising in the north would have made any other policy untenable. There is, therefore, more than enough reason to revise the now customary separation made on so-called ethnic grounds by historians, following the mechanistic account of the German General Staff, between the 'war against the Herero' and the 'war against the Hottentots'. Even Loth and Drechsler uncritically perpetuate this practice.

With the adherence of Hendrik Witbooi to the uprising the situation changed dramatically. Marengo who until then had enjoyed a kind of social bandit status in and around the Great Karasberg, which was his internal base, became one of a number of sub-commandants under the general command of Witbooi. In actual fact, however each of the guerrilla leaders was almost perfectly autonomous and all of them had a sound tactical grasp. However, it was only of Marengo that his German opponents were prepared to say that 'there was something large-scale about his warfare'. In other words, they also acknowledged his strategic grasp.

It is almost incredible today in view of the oblivion into which his name has fallen to realise that in his day his method of waging guerrilla warfare was compared with the best of the Boer generals. In fact he was called the Black De Wet. There are innumerable examples of back-handed accolades forthcoming from his imperialist and racist opponents. A single example must suffice. After the internment of Marengo in Tokai prison, Cape Town in May 1905, the German General Staff were moved to write that:

> The elimination of Morenga from the ranks of the enemies of the Germans was a significant success of

> German arms. Even though this event could not have the same effect as the death of Hendrik Witbooi because of the rapidly sinking reputation of Morenga among the Bondels, yet this Herero-bastard stood out above all the other Hottentot leaders because of his personal stature, his determination, his will to act, his courage. He can be seen as the intellectual source of most of the Hottentot attacks, which were executed with such great skill. His internment was a blow to the cause of the Hottentots that could not be repaired. (Vol. 2 p. 282)

We understand this sentiment when we realise that at the height of the war Marengo and his people (with only a few hundred rifles) kept more than 15 000 German soldiers tied down in Central and Southern SWA. Unlike the other commanders of the insurgents, Marengo well understood the international ramifications of the struggle. In particular, he was well aware of Germany's vast supplies, as he told a reporter of the *Cape Times* on his arrival at Upington in May 1906. But he was an exponent of a protracted war strategy based on the enemy's ignorance of the terrain and alienation from the indigenous people. Moreover, for a while he managed to exploit skilfully the inter-imperialist rivalry between Britain and Germany. It was, of course, in Britain's interests to allow the war to drag on because of the way in which it sapped German prestige but more pressingly because of the way that the conduct of the war in the south depended on the purchase of supplies in the Cape and their conveyance through the province to the borders of German SWA. Britain kept this policy of alleged neutrality as long as there was no serious danger of the uprising spilling over on to Cape soil and infecting the natives in South Africa. We know, from the same interview, moreover, that Marengo was primarily concerned with a return to the *status quo ante*. He was desirous of exchanging German rule for British rule as he expected justice and fair

play from Britain. This naive political belief, which was being challenged at that very moment in Natal in the so-called Bambatha Rebellion may or may not have been too seriously meant (after all he was in British captivity) but it is implicit from Marengo's background and from the composition of his fighting force that he was not fighting to restore the power of the chiefs. Significantly, his main lieutenants were themselves not tribal dignitaries. Abraham Norris, for instance, 35 years of age at the time, had been the driver of the post cart in Warmbad while his brother Edward (30 years of age) had been a policeman there.

As in July/August 1904, Marengo's act of opening the war in the south had delayed and probably prevented the final solution of the Herero problem as the General Staff saw it, so again in October/November 1905 after the death of Hendrik Witbooi and the capitulation of the Witbooi people, it was Marengo who rallied those remaining in the field and kept the enemy's lines stretched out. When, after his year-long internment in Tokai he was released he promptly re-opened hostilities. For a moment it seemed as though the uprising would flare up again just as the Germans shamefacedly and in utter relief were about to withdraw their troops from the theatre of Germany's bloodiest and costliest colonial war. But now Britain and Germany were collaborating openly and Marengo did not stand a chance. Marengo no longer had a friendly neighbouring country to serve as an external base. The Cape was no longer his Angola or perhaps his Zambia. He decided to head for the Kalahari in Bechuanaland Protectorate in order to link up with Simon Kopper and his people and there to bide his time for the next round of the struggle. Before this plan could be effected he was overtaken by an English hot-pursuit party and killed on 20 September 1907. The British were convinced that Marengo was the kind of leader who could let loose a general revolt of blacks in the whole of South Africa (see Generalstab Vol.

2 p. 353).

Marengo, in the words of Drechsler, 'knew no narrow tribalism: not Nama *against* Herero but Nama *and* Herero against German imperialism! Once he had recognised the correctness of this principle he stuck to it consistently.'

After the capitulation of the Bondelzwarts and the death of Marengo, Abraham Morris refused to return to South West Africa while it was under German rule. He had been Marengo's most loyal lieutenant and refused even to consider adhering to the peace treaty signed in 1906 by the Bondels chieftain Johannes Christian, unless he was allowed to consult Marengo. Morris only returned after the colony was formally mandated to South Africa by the League of Nations. He became one of the main leaders of the so-called Bondelzwarts affair of 1922, when the people refused to pay a dog tax and eventually took to arms. The rebellion was crushed by means of deploying aeroplanes and armoured vehicles against the poorly armed peasants and workers. Morris was killed. Sporadic armed resistance was finally crushed in 1925 when the people of Rehoboth were forced to understand that they were not an independent nation.

In the person of Chief Hosea Kutako, there is an important personal link between the original uprising and the present phase of the liberation movement. To the leadership of this young warrior Samuel Maharero had committed those Herero people who remained in South West Africa and did not withdraw into Bechuanaland Protectorate with him. Kutako became one of the first petitioners to the UNO and later also a founding member of SWAPO.

Meanwhile, the first large-scale workers' struggles in Namibia followed almost immediately on the great uprising. Loth has shown in an important article that these more advanced class struggles were led, organised and largely carried out by Xhosa-speaking contract workers

from South Africa ('Zu der Anfängen des Kampfes der Arbeiter Südwestafrikas gegen den deutschen Imperialismus'. Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Karl-Marx Universität. Leipzig 1961). He shows that there were thousands of Ovambo-speaking migrant workers on diamond mines at Luderitzbucht, some Herero and Nama workers on railway building projects, on settler farms and in transport. But most railway workers had to be imported from the Cape because of the decimation of the Nama/Herero labour force in the great uprising. There were many cases of spontaneous acts (sabotage, withholding of labour) against German imperialism. One of the main such strikes was undertaken by a large group of SA railway workers near Wilhelmstal in September-October 1910. In this and other actions, Loth sees the symptoms of the beginnings of more advanced forms of class struggle such as planned desertions, protection of strike leaders, the demand to negotiate with the colonial power only at the place of work, the realisation that only collective action produces successes, the demand for the release of prisoners, etc.

When one takes account of the simultaneity and interconnections between these actions and the armed resistance I have spoken about one realises that there is indeed continuity, a kind of growing over of one form of struggle into the other with a gradual, often only vaguely perceived shift in the target of resistance. By focusing on men like Jakob Marengo and the people they led in the years between 1903 and 1907, I believe one can in the Namibian case establish very clearly the connections between 'primary resistance' and the present national liberation movement as Ranger demands, 'without romanticism'. From the point of view of the tasks of such a national movement, in particular that of attaining and maintaining national unity and national independence, this is a necessary and a worthwhile inquiry.

RESPONSES TO GERMAN RULE IN NAMIBIA OR THE ENIGMA OF THE KHOWESIN

NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS in their search for evidence with which to document the exploits of the heroes and heroines of earlier resistance movements are subject to the temptations of reckless mythmaking. The tendency to falsify the historical record (usually by omission or understatement of unpalatable facts) springs from the understandable importance attached within a nationalist framework to the establishment of some connection between the contemporary struggles for national liberation or national independence and the so-called primary resistance movements of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. More and more historians have begun to question some of the inarticulate premises of what has come to be called 'the African nationalist school of historiography'. One of these assumptions, viz., that armed resistance was the only possible or relevant response of colonised African peoples, is manifest in the tendency to ignore 'primary collaborations, i.e., collaboration with the establishment of colonial regimes by members of African societies under the pressures of imperial invasion ...' (Steinhart 1974: 46).

To demythologise the history of earlier popular attempts at preventing the imposition of colonial rule even while wars of national liberation such as that in Namibia against the universally condemned colonial regime of South Africa are in progress is in certain respects both a hazardous and an imperative task. Already in my opening statement, the dangerous word 'collaboration' has fallen. I shall deal with this question presently but it is clear that the would-be

myth-breaker in the historiography of African resistance has to guard particularly against the trap of making anachronistic and ahistorical judgements.

In the following remarks, I shall discuss the fate of the Khowesin (more generally known as the Witbooi people) during the period 1885–1905 since the events that befell this group of people during those twenty years exemplify the problems that have to be confronted by the historian of African resistance who wishes to establish the connection between 'primary resistance' to the imposition of colonial rule and the present national liberation movement 'without romanticism' (see Ranger 1977: 133). In this connection, the process of myth-making around the figure of Hendrik Witbooi is particularly relevant. In contemporary descriptions of Witbooi by friend and foe alike, as well as in present-day assessments by historians and politicians there is almost always a hyperbolical tone. In a recent work he is described as 'without a doubt the most impressive personality ever produced by the tribes of South West Africa' (Bridgman 1981: 43–44). Much of this kind of laudatory assessment simply echoes the paternalistic praise dished out by German soldiers and officials during Witbooi's lifetime and shortly after his death. Of these, the classical example is the obituary written by ex-Governor Leutwein:

> The name of the little Captain will ... remain engraved upon the history of South West Africa for ever. His stubborn resistance against the mighty German Empire at the head of a warlike band, ragged and poor; his ten years of loyalty to our cause; and finally the daring of another rising against us; these have linked his name inseparably with the history of the Protectorate. I still see him before me, the little Captain, ten years my faithful brother-in-arms. Modest yet self-possessed, loyal yet not without political cunning, never deviating from what he considered his duty or his right, fully

> understanding the superior culture of the whites, yet by no means always in love with those who purveyed it, – a born leader and ruler: this was Witbooi, who would undoubtedly have become immortal in world history had not the fates ordained him to be born to an insignificant African throne. He was the last national hero of a race doomed to destruction. (Leutwein 58–59)

It is understandable that both detractors and worshippers of Hendrik Witbooi have persistently concentrated on the many instances of overt armed resistance on the part of the Khowesin. Usually, the ten-year period 1895–1904 when Witbooi, according to Leutwein, was loyal to the German cause and was his faithful 'brother-in-arms' is only mentioned. In many cases it is 'present' only as a hiatus in the history of the Khowesin. Where attempts are made to explain the enigma, they are either inconclusive or fantastical. To this latter variety belongs what I shall call, for lack of a better term, the historical novelette *Hendrik Witbooi, FreiheitsKampf in Südwestafrika* written in 1974 for youthful readers by Martin Selber. In this little book, Selber takes the freedom which poetic licence imparts *ad absurdum*. He creates an image of Witbooi as philosopher-mystic, guerrilla leader and prescient revolutionary super-statesman all rolled into one. According to this picture, Witbooi during the ten-year period of collaboration with the German colonial authorities was biding his time, working out a blueprint for a protracted war against his German 'friends' whom he was all the time double-crossing.

It is an entertaining and not uninformative booklet. This Hendrik Witbooi, alas, never existed even though he now inhabits the cranial cavities of (mostly East) German children and adults. Perhaps, we should not concern ourselves overmuch with cultural policy and poetic licence. But there is a real danger that this kind of thing can be

palmed off as authentic history for dubious and even dangerous political purposes. After all, it is barely two weeks since Andre du Toit is reported as having undertaken the – for him possibly agonising – task of telling Afrikaner children and adults that much of the so-called history of the Afrikaner 'nation' written by and for Afrikaners is mythological in the wrong sense of the word, i.e., unsubstantiated, indeed unsubstantiable nonsense. (See *Sunday Times* article 'Chosen people? It's a myth says the "critical Afrikaner"', 18 July 1982).

It is clear to me that nationalist historiography of this kind is a poison that should not be allowed entry into the body politic if it can be prevented. For this reason – and not because of any juvenile iconoclastic compulsion – I consider it necessary to look more closely at the problem of 'collaboration' by African peoples, groups and individuals during the process of colonial-imperialist conquest and specifically to explain what I have called the enigma of the Khowesin. In doing so, I hope that it is understood and accepted that I approach the problem in the same spirit as did the Isaacmans in 1977 when they asserted that

> Collaboration is a subject which is politically sensitive and often ignored ... (but) just as we can identify a tradition of resistance, so we can speak of recurring patterns of collaboration. *Such an assertion does not diminish the commitment of most Africans to be free*; it merely emphasises the variety of responses which reflected different ethnic, religious, and growing class interests. (Isaacman and Isaacman 1977: 55. My emphasis.)

II

Let us consider first the options which the Namibian peoples actually had in their initial confrontations with German imperialism. At the risk of oversimplifying a

complex process, we should note the following two points:

- Capitalist penetration of Namibia began long before colonial conquest in 1884–1904 or even the arrival of European missionaries in 1842. The first agents of the capitalist market were the migrating Orlam people who, though they were outside the formal political boundaries of the Cape colony, like the later (and therefore misnamed) Voortrekkers, maintained their vital links with the Cape market because of their demand for arms, ammunition and other necessities connected with wagons, clothing, food and religion. This point was dealt with in some detail in a lecture on *Precolonial Namibia* by Brigitte Lau.
- From 1884 onwards German South West Africa was consciously developed as a *settler colony*. This meant amongst other things that the imperial power deliberately exported a ready-made class of agents who would ensure that the colonial capitalist mode of production would become dominant in the colony. On a secondary level, the establishment of a settler colony brought into being contradictions between the land-hungry settlers and the colonial bureaucracy, which meant that there was a constant struggle for hegemony between different strata of the imperialist classes.

In considering this question of options, we should at once reject the practice of posing it in terms of a mutually exclusive alternative of either resistance or collaboration. While this way of posing the question undoubtedly makes for a spurious analytical tidiness, it has nothing to do with what actually happened except in a few marginal cases. What Shula Marks said about Khoisan resistance at the Cape holds for the peoples of Namibia as well:

> The complex range of responses of the Khoisan to the Dutch seems to suggest that there are few societies, however small-scale ... that have not

> responded to colonial conquest by at times collaborating and at times resisting, though undoubtedly the nature of both the accommodation and the resistance has in part to be related to social structure. (Marks 1972: 60)

We can say without further analysis that all the precolonial sovereignties of Namibia manifested this rhythm of resistance and collaboration. The Khowesin were no different in this regard from the Herero, the Bondelzwarts, the Mbanderu and other Namibian peoples. We can say further that the hegemonic strata in these societies who at any given moment determined the policy of the people were always confronted by other strata who proposed different or even opposite strategies to meet the imperialist onslaught. These kinds of statements are acquiring the status of truisms in the historiography of African resistance but we need to be reminded of them in regard to the history of Namibia since even the best histories continue to speak unproblematically of 'The Herero', 'The Nama' and so forth on the assumption that there was little or no social differentiation within these formations. It is unfortunately still not superfluous to repeat Allan and Barbara Isaacman's critique of this position:

> To a large measure the choice of reactions which historians have studied has been determined by their implicit emphasis on racial categories, that is, the juxtaposition of European aggressors against African defenders. The resulting implication often has been that all Africans during this period were fighting to maintain or regain their independence. Such an analysis assumes *a priori* that members of a particular African society shared a common set of interests and goals, and to a lesser degree that a spirit of fraternity often linked neighbouring states and chieftaincies. (Isaacman and Isaacman 1977: 34)

III

All historians of Namibia are agreed that the most prominent feature of the responses of the peoples who inhabited the country at the time of German penetration and conquest was their failure to forge an alliance to oppose the foreigners. The position has been characterised rather crudely by Nachtwei as follows:

> The Herero and Nama peoples could ... only obstruct and delay colonial occupation. They could neither prevent nor limit it. For the decisive and historically unavoidable weakness – in the phase of primary resistance – was the fact that their only political perspective was the restoration of traditional pre-capitalist relationships, the fact that beyond the transcendence of tribal barriers for military purposes they were unable to create an all-embracing united front of all the tribal groups opposed to colonialism and organised under one central command. Moreover, they remained internationally isolated. The international workers' movement, especially the German workers, did not yet see the colonial peoples as their allies in the struggle against the same enemy, viz., imperialism and colonialism. (Nachtwei 1976:49–50)

(This judgement is borne out by any detailed study of German policy in the colony of South West Africa. See, for instance, Sudholt 1975, Bley 1971, Drechsler 1966 and 1980.)

The failure to create such a united front must be explained by reference to the stage of social development attained by the polities then in existence in Namibia and, more concretely, by the drawn-out struggles for land and cattle waged between Namas and Hereros. This struggle was in essence a contest for hegemony between two ruling families bent on creating what we would call a national monarchy. The Orlam Afrikaner clan had made the Herero tributary because of its superiority in weapons and military

know-how but with the intervention of German missionaries on the side of the Herero this situation was being altered in favour of the Herero. These circumstances were so to speak the ideal environment in which the youthful dreams and visions of Hendrik Witbooi, drawn mainly from a too narrow concentration on the historical and prophetic books of the Old Testament, could flourish. As happens so often in large social movements in this case too the peculiarities of the individual were nurtured by the objective social conditions and in turn helped to shape and to direct social development.

The life of Hendrik Witbooi (Nanseb) is well known in outline. In the limited time at my disposal, I shall mention only a few of the necessary dates and events in his lifetime and discuss some of the relevant moments in more detail. He was born in 1830 somewhere south of the Orange River while the Khowesin were migrating northwards away from the dispossessing and exploiting movement of the trekboers. His childhood and youth were lived in and around Pella where he also attended school on an irregular basis. It was at Pella that his grandfather, Kido Witbooi, became captain or chief of the migrating pastoralists. In 1850 they crossed the Orange into Namibia, engaged in a series of wars and raids against indigenous Nama/Damara groups and by about 1863 were persuaded to settle down at Gibeon.

During the next twenty years, the Khowesin, like other Orlam groups, helped to engrave the iron laws of commodity exchange on the relatively peaceful territory of southern and central Namibia. They raided livestock (or levied tribute) from the pastoral nomads of these parts and sold it to itinerant pedlars from the Cape in exchange for vital goods such as clothing, sugar, tools, horses and above all, rifles and ammunition. How important the latter items were as a means of production can be gauged from a statement made by Witbooi as reported in *Dagboek van*

Hendrik Witbooi:

> I look upon the question of arms like this: guns and ammunition are free goods for everyone. You (Germans) cannot appropriate them to yourselves alone and regulate their sale and distribution with penalties ... Let arms be freely available to all in this country. We live by the gun, we are hunters, and we need to protect ourselves against enemies and wild beasts ... A man who stops arms is like a man who keeps another from water. (Voigts 1929: 135–136)

Hendrik Witbooi lived a secluded and contemplative life at Gibeon, was strongly influenced in his attitudes and beliefs by the missionary Olpp and opposed his father (Moses) in regard to the continued raids on neighbouring peoples (which he saw as theft). It is clear that Hendrik Witbooi spoke for that segment of the people who hoped to establish a permanent but politically independent outpost of the Cape market north of the Orange, one based on the unity of the 'Red People', as the Khoikhoi were often referred to. It was clear to Hendrik Witbooi that a flourishing 'Christian' community could not be based on a raiding economy. The idea of uniting all the Namas and later the Hereros as well runs like a golden thread through the life of Hendrik Witbooi. The peculiar economic weakness of his people, the Khowesin, which required to be embedded in a larger and stable entity in order to survive in the long run constituted the subsoil for the germination and growth of this idea. The myopic and parochial perspectives of the old guard led by Moses Witbooi could not countenance the policy of peace and diplomacy implied by Hendrik's practical strategy. For this reason, the eventual break between Hendrik and his father came about in 1884 when the younger man led the majority of the community from Gibeon to a new seat at Hornkranz in the vicinity of present-day Marienthal.

Hendrik Witbooi saw and styled himself as King of Greater Namaland. His biblical and missionary background

provided him with a ready-made analogy in the story of Moses. He saw himself as a messianic figure born to unite and to liberate his people. Moreover, because of his consistent success and numerous victories over lesser chiefs that opposed his designs his followers, the community at Gibeon and at Hornkranz, also looked upon him as a messiah. I do not have time here to explore the question of the dominant ideology among the Nama in detail but it is of great importance to realise that Witbooi, like other Nama chiefs, projected their struggle in terms of an original, Biblical Christianity as opposed to the allegedly tainted, non-Biblical variety purveyed by the German imperialists and their agents, the missionaries. This led to the establishment of an independent African Church which later quite naturally dovetailed with the rapidly expanding Ethiopian movement in South Africa.

By the year 1888, when Hendrik succeeded his deceased father as the elected captain of the Khowesin, almost the entire Southern Namibia of today was controlled by him. Like the previous Nama attempt at state building under the Afrikaaners, Hendrik was compelled to continue the war against the cattle-rich Herero who refused the Khowesin permission to settle in the promised land of Hendrik's dreams to the north of Damaraland where the pasture was better and more secure. Ever since the mid '70s the Herero had begun to use Lutheran missionaries and traders in order to reduce and eventually to eliminate the forced taxation imposed on them by the Nama warlords. In 1872 Kamaherero had written the first letter to Sir Henry Barkly, the Governor of the Cape in which he asked 'that the excellent British Government will give us a hint how to govern our poor country, and extend a helping hand to our poor people in giving us good advice as to what we are to do to retain our country because the Namaquas will not live in peace ...' Like so many other African potentates, some of the Herero leaders, because of their desire to retain their

power and their sovereignty, were misled to view the Europeans as 'just another "tribe" whose presence could be used to bolster their regional position' (Isaacman and Isaacman 1977: 58). Unlike men such as Hendrik Witbooi they had no notion of what lay behind the skeletal staff of missionary, commercial and military agents of imperialism.

When the German colonialists began to offer so-called treaties of protection to all the diverse Nama and Herero chieftains in pursuance of their policies of dispossession and divide-and-rule, Maharero was one of the first to fall into the carefully laid trap. Witbooi was the most determined opponent of any policy of compromise with the Germans and until 1895 led the resistance. He realised very soon that the German intervention spelt disaster for all the peoples of Namibia. In response to this mortal danger, which only a people could appreciate that had been fleeing before the all-consuming greed and indifference to human life and happiness inherent in the capitalist mode of production, Witbooi tried to forge a defensive alliance with the Herero and in effect put forward the slogan of Africa for the Africans. I quote here the relevant passages from his famous letter to Maharero of 30 May 1890, written after he had heard that Maharero had accepted German 'protection' from the empty hands of Dr Goering:

> I am amazed at this, and take it very ill of you who call yourself the supreme chief of Damaraland. That you are indeed. This dry land is known by only two names – Damaraland and Namaland. Damaraland belongs to the Herero people, and Namaland to the Red peoples, both as self-governing kingdoms, just as it is said of the white men's countries, Germany and England. Each nation has its ruler, and every ruler has his own people and country where he alone commands and rules. No other man or Captain has the right to force his will, for every ruler in this world is merely a steward for our common great God, and answerable to this great God alone ...

> But you, dear Captain, you have accepted another rule, and have handed yourself over to a human supremacy for protection against all dangers – primarily and most immediately against me in this war of ours. But, my dear Captain, do you realise what you have done? Perhaps you saw only me before you, a nuisance and a source of trouble, and accepted this mighty ally to humiliate me with his help. Perhaps that was your aim. It is hard indeed for me to say this, and harder still to know that you will probably succeed.
>
> But it seems to me you took too little account of yourself, of your land and of your people, and your heirs, and your Captaincy. You may think you will keep all these things after you have finished me ... But I tell you you will come to rue it bitterly. You will for ever regret that you have given your land and your sovereignty into the hands of white men ... (Voigts 1929: 77–83)

The entire Khowesin community stood behind their captain, and the Germans knew that they would never gain control of South West Africa until they had defeated this 'implacable opponent of any form of submission to German rule' (Von Francois, quoted in Drechsler 1980: 54). This became especially urgent after the signing of the Peace Treaty of November 1892 between the Herero and the Nama, which treaty marks the zenith of Witbooi's drive for unification. For eighteen months, first under Von Francois and then under Leutwein, the German colonial authority conducted an all-out war against the Witboois. Leutwein adopted the classical divide-and-rule tactics which he claimed to have learned from the British. By isolating and conquering the different autonomous societies one after the other, he eventually drove Witbooi into the corner in August/September 1894. The result of the ill-fated Battle at the Naukluft was the *conditional* surrender of the Khowesin and to all intents and purposes the end of Witbooi

resistance to German rule. For the next ten years, until the great uprising of 1904, the Witbooi people were to be among the most loyal and consistent allies of German colonial rule. On almost every occasion that Leutwein set out to put down what he cynically described as 'rebellions' by one or other colonised group of people, the Witboois provided well-trained auxiliaries to assist their German allies-cum-masters. By November 1895, he had persuaded the Witboois to agree to 'respond unconditionally and instantaneously, with all men capable of bearing arms, to any call from the Governor appointed by His Majesty the German Emperor to resist external and internal enemies of the German protectorate' (quoted in Drechsler 1980: 80).

IV

How is this enigma to be explained? Anyone who has read the letters, such as the one I have quoted which Hendrik Witbooi wrote to other chieftains is inevitably at a loss for any easy answer to this question. Let us look at some of the hypotheses that have been put forward. In this connection, it is as well to point out that almost all the writers who have examined this question have made two related errors. They have confused the objective dimension of historical explanation with the subjective or psychological dimension. And they have done so because they have made the cardinal error of the historian who – to paraphrase a noted Soviet Africanist – in concentrating on the personality, has missed the laws of social development (Davidson 1968: 186).

The explanation proffered by Leutwein is typical of the colonial racist mentality and I repeat it here only to remind ourselves that people actually did and many still do think like this. According to Leutwein,

> It would appear that Hendrik Witbooi had two souls in his breast. The one was the Christian and

> civilised soul which was manifest during the ten--year period of peace under our rule. The second was the brutal, fanatical Hottentot soul which apparently had merely been dormant only to be awakened at the time of the last uprising. (Leutwein 1912: 67)

According to this bankrupt *herrenvolk* view of the matter, then, Hendrik Witbooi during those ten years managed to repress his atavistic drives because of the Christian influence on him. His followers, in sheeplike submission, collaborated with the Germans as loyal allies and subjects.

The next rung on the explanatory ladder is reached with the view that Hendrik Witbooi made a mistake in 1894 in that he placed his trust in Leutwein. Surprisingly, this is the view sponsored by, amongst others, Horst Drechsler, author of the best work to date on German South West Africa. He viewed the capitulation of the Khowesin as 'a decisive breach in the African front' and claims that

> it was only ten years later that Hendrik Witbooi saw through Leutwein's perfidious schemes and realized that his unnatural alliance with the Germans had been a disastrous mistake which he then tried to make good with the Nama rebellion against German imperialism. (Drechsler 1980: 95)

At various points in his book, Drechsler repeats and reinforces this judgement. In regard to the significant uprising of the Khauas people and the Mbanderu of 1896, which the Witbooi auxiliaries helped to put down, Drechsler says that

> owing to the disastrous policy of collaboration with the German colonial power practised at this stage by Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, the Khauas and Mbandjeru found themselves in total isolation, which was the ultimate reason for their defeat. (Drechsler 1980: 95)

With an infallible logic, Drechsler ends up by dispensing homiletic advice to freedom fighters. 'The trials and

tribulations of those Witboois, who had fought with the Germans until they were disarmed, is evidence that collaboration with the enemy brings little reward' (Drechsler 1980: 185). In fairness to Drechsler, I should perhaps say that his view is the most commonly held one and that by deciding for a definite hypothesis he at least avoids the kind of helplessness of a Rainer Clause who, in his doctoral these on *Reactions to Colonialism and Imperialism. Examination of the Peoples of Namibia* has to admit pathetically that 'it is difficult to say whether they (the 'tribal chiefs') acted out of opportunism or because they realised that they had made a mistake when they allowed themselves to be bribed' (Claus 1977: 77).

But this kind of historical writing raises at least two fundamental problems. There is firstly, and less importantly, the perennial problem of the paradigm within which historical inevitability and individual freedom are locked in a mutually exclusive relationship. One cannot on the one hand maintain that in the phase of primary resistance the Nama-Herero alliance could do no more than delay or obstruct the colonial conquest and on the other hand censure the conquered people for 'collaborating' with their conquerors. The first judgement is, like any genuine postulation of inevitability, based on hindsight, whereas the latter presupposes foreknowledge of an end different from the one that actually occurred. More obviously, it raises the age-old problem of the relationship between moral judgement and historical explanation.

It is in this connection, too, that the second problem arises. I refer to the very concept of collaboration in relation to the actions of peoples living within pre-national and even pre-class societies. It is certainly not my position that words or concepts should be banished from our language and from our analysis once they have been compromised by war criminals and genocidal movements such as the Nazis represented. But none of us can ignore the fact that use of

certain words and less directly of certain concepts is best avoided because of the recent and even contemporary character of the events to which that usage willy-nilly directs our minds. In his thought-provoking essay on 'Anti-colonial resistance and nationalism', Steinhart touched on the problem as follows:

> ... (The) major reason that collaboration has appeared as an ignored or submerged theme among the nationalist historians has been a tendency to avoid the use of collaboration as a descriptive term and to completely eschew the term collaborators for characterizing Africans engaged in cooperative action with the colonial regimes. The highly colored and political origins of that term in the European context of cooperation with Fascist invasion in the 1930s and 40s can be used to justify this systematic avoidance. (Steinhart 1976: 47)

Speaking as I am to an audience in the Western Cape in the 1980s, I am sure that I can rely on a sympathetic response to my view that it is impermissible to have men like Hendrik Witbooi and groups of people such as the Khowesin equated with a Quisling, a Petain, or with supine political groups such as the so-called Freedom Party or the so-called Labour Party who are today working or getting ready to work with the 'New Dispensation' against the majority of the nation. Indeed, most of the historians who use the term to describe the parochial responses to colonial conquest that led to alliances with the conquerors against other colonised groups of people, do so with a distinct sense of the inappropriateness thereof. To quite a single significant example: Ronald Robinson, in his essay entitled 'Non-European foundations of European imperialism : sketch for a theory of collaboration', stresses that 'the term is used in no pejorative sense (Robinson 1980: 120). His reason for saying this is that the so-called collaborators or mediators perceived the foreigners as importing 'an

alternative source of wealth and power which, if it could not be excluded, had to be exploited in order to preserve or improve the standing of indigenous elites *in the traditional order*' (Robinson 1980: 121. My emphasis.)

Here we have an important hint about the nature of this problem. Quisling and Petain were collaborators and acquired the odium that attaches to traitors because they betrayed their respective nations in a European world where the principle of national self-determination and the equality of all nations under international law had been enshrined in the Covenant of the League of Nations and in one post-war treaty after another. To speak of collaboration in situations where, as Steinhart rightly insists, the very concept of the nation had not yet come into being (see Steinhart 1976: 61) is to run the risk of distorting the historical record irrecoverably. To say, as does Randolph Vigne albeit in a completely contradictory context that Hendrik Witbooi's 'intense sectional loyalty to the Nama led inexorably to their destruction as a national unit without achieving the greater good of leading them into a Namibian nationhood which might have withstood the German power ...' (Vigne 1973: 10–11) is to speak anachronistically in the most obvious sense, besides placing on the individual historical subject a weight which in most other contexts one would not expect it to bear.

If one were to push this kind of reasoning to its logical limits one would end up in the absurd position where one would have to accuse the Ovambo-speaking people of the north of 'passive collaboration' because they did not do much to help the Herero in their hour of need. By an imputed policy of abstentionism, so the argument would run, they facilitated the imposition of German rule, hence 'collaborated' with the German authorities to abort the Namibian nation! The fact, of course, is that there was at the time no Namibian nation and no sense of Namibian nationhood. The reasons why the Ovambo-speaking

peoples did not assist the Herero and Nama insurgents on a larger scale than they actually did have nothing to do with treachery and collaboration, and for the same reasons, it is irrelevant and confusing to speak of collaboration in the case of the Khowesin or of any other group of people before 1907.

Against this background, it ought to be clear that the use of the term can only be legitimate if it is seen as generated from the point of view of a fragmented indigenous group where the majority or a large and potentially powerful minority are opposed to the policy of alliance followed by the leadership. By the same logic, if we are going to dub entire communities and peoples 'collaborators' we have to assume a higher unit of which that collectivity is a component as, for instance, in a nation or in a federation of allies. I find some support for this reasoning in Charles van Onselen's paper on 'The role of collaborators in the Rhodesian mining industry 1900–1935'. In defining the term 'collaborators' for the purposes of his paper, he mentions three reasons why he considers it legitimate to use the term. These are:

> First, as a group, these Africans were responsible for implementing a series of policies which the majority of the population had no share in formulating. These policies consequently led to a series of practices which the majority of the population found abhorrent. Secondly, they sold specific skills such as linguistic ability or military prowess which greatly facilitated the functioning of a labour-coercive system. Thirdly, and most importantly, these groups were consciously perceived as collaborators by the indigenous people in the colony and rejected for their role. (Van Onselen 1973: 403)

Condition no. 1 does not apply because we are dealing with a defeated but autonomous people. Condition no. 3 does not apply because there is no evidence that any of the

Khowesin or of the Nama-speaking people for that matter saw Witbooi or his people as 'collaborators' at any stage. Condition no. 2 is, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable but raises the question of whether integration at any level into the imperialist network can objectively be described in terms of collaboration. That imperialist policies, after the initial dispossession of the indigenous occupants of the land, in most cases tended to create a system that has been referred to as colonial fascism may be allowed. But to equate what Steinhart ironically called 'primary collaboration' with the collaboration of classes and individuals who wanted to rise up *within the scale of the colonial system after its entrenchment* is to confuse issues impermissibly. To put the matter differently: there is simply no way in which a Hendrik Witbooi or even a Samuel Maharero can be described as a 'policeman-chief'! (See Tabata 1952: 5–7.)

How then are we to describe the situation of the Khowesin and the status of Hendrik Witbooi? I believe that it is essential to state as clearly as possible the objective historical situation in which these people found themselves in the period under discussion before one begins to scratch around for psychologistic hypotheses.

To begin with, the Khowesin were defeated in 1894. Hendrik Witbooi, on behalf of his people, capitulated to Leutwein on certain condition. One of these conditions, not unexpectedly, was that the Khowesin would be allowed to retain their arms. In a letter to the Imperial Chancellor, Leutwein informed him that 'Witbooi did not offer to surrender unconditionally, but only to accept the German Emperor' (quoted in Drechsler 1980: 79). The Khowesin, therefore, saw themselves as retaining a certain measure of autonomy and decision-making power. And, in fact, their cooperation with the Germans against various insurgent groups of people until 1904 is to be understood as a quid pro quo for continued autonomy rather than as an acceptance of German aims.

The second stubborn fact is that the Khowesin themselves were not united on matters of policy and strategy. A capitulationist faction, led by Samuel Isaak, and an irredentist or war party led by Isaak Witbooi, Hendrik's son, vied for influence and control of the direction of the affairs of the people. The old man, in a kind of Bonapartist remoteness, united the factions through his acquired and inherited authority and, because of the tug-o'-war in the community, was able to wield greater power than he traditionally had. Various writers, including Drechsler, have indicated that the younger generation of subchiefs adopted a different attitude towards German colonial rule from that of Hendrik Witbooi and that it was their pressure and criticism which, in the light of the circumstance of the first six months of 1904 when the German troops were exterminating the Herero people, led to the declaration of war against Germany in October 1904 (see Drechsler 1980: 181; Borkowski 1981: 154). In this connection, it is especially important to note that the Khowesin had become convinced that the German authorities and the colonists intended to disarm them as soon as they had mopped up the last pockets of armed resistance among the Herero people.

Even on the subjective plane, there are a number of verifiable facts. We know that Hendrik Witbooi, after 1894, realised that the Germans could no longer be challenged militarily. His original challenge had in any case been based on the belief that all the Nama- and all the Herero-speaking people would be able to unite in opposition to the then small platoon of soldiers sent by the Imperial authorities to protect not the 'natives' as they always maintained but the mining and colonising ventures undertaken by Germans, British and South Africans. This, as we have seen, was the reason for the Peace Treaty with the Herero in 1892. But when this broke down and the Khowesin were compelled to capitulate in 1894, Witbooi adopted a conservative strategy of retaining what they had, not provoking the

Germans into summary dispossession and resettlement of the Khowesin community. This policy involved them in numerous compromises which were undertaken for the purpose of retaining the semblance of self-government that the treaty with Leutwein allowed for. That Witbooi himself suffered severely under the necessity of making these compromises is eloquently attested in a letter written to the Nama chieftains just before the uprising of October 1904:

> As you know, for a long time I lived under the law, according to the hope and in the expectation that God our father would in the fulness of time ordain our redemption from all the misery of this world. For my mind, I tolerated it all because I trusted in the Lord. (Quoted in Leutwein 1912: 57.)

It seems to me that the most consistent explanation, having regard to everything that we know, is that Hendrik Witbooi would only strike a blow for freedom if he could be assured of the possibility of unity of all the people of central and southern Namibia. It was that stance that led to the capitulation of 1894 and which again made possible the uprising of 1904. There is enough evidence that Witbooi, like Jakob Marengo, realised that within limits the British in the Cape Colony could be counted upon to make things difficult for the Germans and that a protracted war could force the Germans to pull in their horns and to allow the traditional chiefs more land, the people better living and working conditions as well as peace.

Though it is not an impossible hypothesis, there is no proof at all that Hendrik Witbooi was pressurised into declaring war by the fact that some of his auxiliaries were deserting from the German army that was fighting against the Herero people (see Borkowski 1980: 154). Indeed, the same set of events can be read in a quite different manner. There is no reason to believe that Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, amongst others, had conspired to launch such an uprising for quite some time before January 1904

(see Bridgman 1981: 72). The following sarcastic report from a special correspondent of the weekly Cape Town magazine *The Owl* of 28 September 1904 shows that much more research needs to be done before such apparently straightforward matters as the 'collaboration' of the Witbooi auxiliaries can be assessed finally. Speaking about the mode of operation of the 'Witbooi scouts' between January and October 1904, the correspondent writes:

> A scout, be he Hottentot, Damara, will stroll into a suppositious native enemy's kraal or camp, eat his share from the cooking pot, entertain his hosts with tales of the white man's pay and purposes and position, advise as to the course to be pursued in avoidance, and return filled with exultant daring to lead the white man to his prey. The German flying party would lumber heavily in the direction of the kraal and arrive there exhausted, but in time to see the last of the cattle string, save a derelict or two, disappear over the distant hills. A volley would be fired at longest range after them, and the office would be able to report having driven back the fugitives with some loss ... So the game has gone on for the best part of the year ...

Even if we allow for some anti-German prejudice, this kind of scouting would seem to have little to do with even the most general notion of collaboration.

V

There is no doubt that the Khowesin, after the initial resistance to German colonial conquest, helped both passively and, to a lesser degree, actively to entrench German rule. In this, they did no more and no less than any other group of people in central and southern Namibia. Because of the nature of the relationships among the different groups their activities were seen by themselves largely as a series of shifting alliances until, when the colonial

authorities and the settlers were ready to twist the sword, they were brought to the realisation that they would have to make one last desperate bid to prevent what had now become inevitable. There is little reason to speculate that even with a more favourable prehistory of relationships that would have facilitated the forging of a united front the Nama-Herero alliance could have averted colonial conquest. There is even less reason to blame individuals such as Hendrik Witbooi or Samuel Maharero for the 'defeat and subsequent genocide of both the Herero and Nama people's (publishers' comment in Drechsler 1980).

The story of the Khowesin demonstrates once again the thesis of Shula Marks that given the unequal technological equipment on the two sides in the contest and given the absence of non-parochial unity, almost all societies have at some time or another both resisted colonial conquest and compromised with the conquerors. I can do no better than to end off this talk by repeating the general conclusion to which Terence Ranger came after detailed studies of many African societies' responses to colonial rule:

> A historian has indeed a difficult task in deciding whether a specific society should be described as 'resistant' or as 'collaborative' over any given period of time. Many societies began in one camp and ended in the other. Virtually all African states made some attempt to find a basis on which to collaborate with the Europeans; virtually all of them had some interests or values which they were prepared to defend, if necessary, by hopeless resistance or revolt.

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THE NAMIBIAN WAR OF ANTICOLONIAL RESISTANCE 1904–1907

THE NAMA-HERERO UPRISING of 1903–1907 is the central event in the recent history of Namibia. This is so because of the overall political significance which the events of those five fateful years had for the country and its people. It ought, therefore, to be obvious that the war and all its implications should become part and parcel of the general knowledge of every inhabitant of Namibia. It ought not to be possible to say that

> for all practical purposes this war has, in a little more than two generations, disappeared from history ... Few Hereros today have more than a hazy idea about their national past, and even fewer Africans know anything about the Herero Revolt. (Bridgman 1981: 1–2)

For this reason, I have chosen to consider today the following five relevant questions:

What was this war? Why was it fought? How was it fought? What is its significance in the history of Namibia? How have historians written about this war?

All these questions are closely related to one another but for the sake of clarity I shall try to keep them apart as much as possible.

What was this war?

To describe the events of 1904–1907 as a 'war' or as an 'uprising' is to avoid committing oneself to a definite position concerning those events. In order to show where ones stands it is necessary to state clearly what the nature of

this war was. By doing so, one usually implies a theory of the war, i.e., one implies why and perhaps also how it was fought.

In ruling-class and colonialist historiography, the war is most often referred to as the 'Herero Rebellion'. If we take the ordinary meaning of these words, we get something like the following set of implications:

(a) Only the Herero-speaking people rose up against the German rulers;

(b) They accepted their subjugation but decided for a number of reasons to act against the laws to which they were subject. This follows from the normal meaning of the term 'rebellion' which implies the lawfulness of the regime and the prior consent of those governed by it.

On both grounds, this naming of the war is unacceptable. But even if one were to extend the adjectival qualification to include Nama and other groups, as is sometimes done, this would not do away with the objection to the implications of the term 'rebellion', besides accepting as unproblematic the idea that the war was fought by an alliance of so-called 'ethnic groups'. The fact of the matter is that with the possible exception of most Rehobothers and some Damara groups, none of the indigenous people of Namibia before 1915 conceded the legitimacy of the regime and 'consent' was a matter of acquiescence imposed by superior force in all cases.

The opposite extreme in the spectrum of nomenclature is the use of the term 'war of liberation' and even 'war of national liberation' often used by authors who are sympathetic to the present struggle of the Namibian people against South African colonialism. This usage involves a number of problems. It was indeed a war of liberation! From the point of view of the oppressed or invaded people, any war is a war of liberation. As such, the term does not

say much more than that it was not a war of aggression on the part of the Namibian people. If the term 'war of liberation' tells us too little, the term 'war of national liberation' implies too much. The fact of the matter is that, the term 'war of national liberation' has come to mean a very precise complex of political, economic and social ends and means, many of which were absent from the war of 1904–1907. Those who use the term mostly imply correctly that this war was in some sense a forerunner, a kind of 'first Chimurenga', to the present war of national liberation being waged by the Namibian people under the leadership of SWAPO. However, unless this usage is explained clearly, it leads to a confusion of concepts and a dilution of the contemporary meaning of the term 'war of national liberation'.

The third most common usage is the phrase 'war of resistance'. It comes nearest to what I consider to be the precise and most significant description of the events, viz., the term 'war of anticolonial resistance'. This latter usage puts the emphasis on the central goal of the uprising, viz., the desperate project of putting an end to German colonial rule. It does not specify what positive end the leaders of the resistance had in mind and this is as it should be since different leaders – as we shall see – had very different goals. The common platform of all, however, was precisely their anticolonialism.

On the other hand, we need to guard against the implications that this was a war of primary resistance. The term primary resistance is fiercely disputed among historians of African resistance mainly because of the implied continuity in both the target and the political ideology of popular resistance. Even though we can in the Namibian sense reconcile the continuity of social development with the discontinuity of qualitatively different social relations at two different points in time , we have to guard against the implication that the object of

resistance as perceived by the resisting people and the motives of resistance were the same in the late 19th/early 20th century and in the post 1950-era (see Alexander 1981: 1–3).

To sum up, we need to insist on the description of the uprising of 1904–1907 as the Namibian war of anti-colonial resistance. The use of Namibia in this case would have geographical and to a lesser degree also political and ideological significance.

Why was it fought?

In an earlier paper, I summed up the fundamental causes of the uprising as follows:

> The systematic dispossession of the Herero (and the Nama) as well as the rightlessness and lack of equality of the people vis-à-vis the settlers constituted the main sub-soil of the movement. The sub-chiefs, typified by Asa Riarua, constituted the vanguard of the movement, giving expression to the people's desperation. The land question (which includes the question of cattle) was central and the movement was clearly aimed at the restoration of the ancestral lands of the Herero. The building of the Otavi railway line was the last straw. Leutwein had cajoled Samuel Maharero into surrendering large blocks of land to the Otavi Mining Company which was building a railway line that ran diagonally through the heart of Hereroland. The Herero people realised that this spelt the end of their independence. One of the most touching elements in the uprising is the war-chant of the Herero women with which they are said to have spurred on their menfolk to resistance. Before and often during battles, they would shout: 'To whom does Hereroland belong? Hereroland belongs to us, the people!' (Alexander 1981: 14; see chapter 1, this volume.)

While most historians are agreed on the centrality of the questions of land and cattle, some tend to play down the land question as such and accept the subjective accounts of some of the actors in the events at face value. Bley, for instance, says that 'political and social discrimination was the main reason given for the revolt' (by Samuel Maharero) and stresses that 'their actual losses of land were less significant than the fact that the Herero headmen felt the position and the future of their tribe to be threatened' (see Bley 1971: 143). We need not get involved here in the age-old game of the historians about the priority or hierarchy of causes. None the less, in Carr's celebrated phrase, 'the historian is known by the causes which he invokes' (Carr 1981: 90). The fact of the matter is that

> up to 1900 only a minor portion of the Herero hereditary lands had been alienated, but with the completion of the railroad to Windhoek the pace of alienation accelerated rapidly, so that by the end of 1903 three and one-half million hectares out of a total of thirteen million had been lost, and the day when the Hereros would not have enough land to continue their traditional way of life was fast approaching. (Bridgman 1981: 57)

Gerhardus Pool, in one of the most detailed treatments of the causes of the uprising, has no doubt that the land question was the most important and fundamental cause. In regard to the behaviour of the traders and merchants, many of whom used the credit system to dispossess the Herero people he writes, *inter alia*

> Dit is 'n feit dat die stelsel van handel op krediet tot die Hereros se ontevredenheid bygedra het, maar daar is nooit bewys gelewer dat dit die hoof oorsaak van die 1904-opstand was nie. (Pool 1979: 42–43)
>
> (It is a fact that the system of trade on credit contributed to the discontent of the Hereros, but it has never been proved that it was the main reason

for the 1904 uprising.)

Drechsler's treatment of the causes of the war remains the most authoritative. He clearly puts the land question at the centre and cites the maladministration of 'justice', exploitative merchant practices and ill-treatment of the indigenous people by the settlers as contributory factors. He also criticises 'bourgeois writers (who) have never openly admitted the real causes behind the Herero insurrection. Instead, they have tended to push other factors into the foreground. The factors cited as alleged causes of the uprising range from the "blood-thirstiness" of the Herero to "racial strife"... ' (Drechsler 1980: 136).

In line with what has been said previously, it is necessary to stress this point since an appreciation thereof throws light on the nature of the war. Even though it is true that many of those men who participated in the war were already labourers on white farms, railways, ports and mines and that many Herero-speaking men who worked in the copper and diamond mines of the Cape Colony returned to Namibia to join in the war (see Nachtwei 1976: 43–44), the fact that the land question (rather than the wages question or the question of political rights) was the central question shows that the main thrust of the war was anticolonial. The chieftaincy and especially the subchiefs, led by men such as Asa Riarua and Isaak Witbooi, wanted to restore the situation as it had obtained before German conquest. The hegemonic ideology was undoubtedly that of the backward-looking chieftaincy. Though the younger people were the more militant and although questions such as wages loomed in the consciousness of some of them, they had no independent ideology that could challenge that of their elders. At best, they differed from the older generation in the assessment of the military-political balance between the opposing camps, having in general a more optimistic view of the outcome of the war they were about to launch.

A notable exception – and not necessarily the only one – was Jakob Marengo. This leader of one of the Bondelzwarts detachments in the war had a qualitatively different conception of the strategy.

> Unlike the other commanders of the insurgents, Marengo well understood the international ramifications of the struggle. In particular, he was well aware of Germany's vast supplies, as he told a reporter of the *Cape Times* on his arrival at Upington in May 1906. But he was an exponent of a protracted war strategy based on the enemy's ignorance of the terrain and alienation from the indigenous people. Moreover, for a while he managed to exploit skilfully the inter-imperialist rivalry between Britain and Germany. It was, of course, in Britain's interests to allow the war to drag on because of the way in which it sapped German prestige but more pressingly because of the way that the conduct of the war in the south depended on the purchase of supplies in the Cape and their conveyance through the province to the borders of German SWA. Britain kept this policy of alleged neutrality as long as there was no serious danger of the uprising spilling over on to Cape soil and infecting the natives in South Africa. We know, from the same interview, moreover, that Marengo was primarily concerned with a return to the *status quo ante*. He was desirous of exchanging German rule for British rule as he expected justice and fair play from Britain. This naive political belief, which was being challenged at that very moment in Natal in the so-called Bambatha Rebellion may or may not have been too seriously meant (after all he was in British captivity) but it is implicit from Marengo's background and from the composition of his fighting force that he was not fighting to restore the power of the chiefs. Significantly, his main lieutenants were themselves not tribal dignitaries. Abraham Morris, for instance, 35 years of age at the time, had been the driver of

> the post cart in Warmbad while his brother Edward (30 years of age) had been a policeman there. (Alexander 1981: 6; see chapter 1 of this volume.)

How was it fought?

If Marengo's view of the situation was clearly an exceptional one, does it mean that the usual portrayal of the war 'as an alliance of ethnic groups' born out of desperation and forged for the restoration of the old order is correct? This is one of the central questions about this war that requires to be studied and analysed with meticulous care for the simple reason that much of the significance that one attaches to the war depends on the answer to that question.

Every single writer on the history of Namibia, including also Drechsler in the latest revised and translated version of his book *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft* (published in 1966), has approached the war as though it was conducted on the side of the African people by an alliance of 'ethnic' states, in the main 'the Hereros' and 'the Namas'. Elsewhere (Alexander 1981: 5) I have suggested that this view is a simplistic one which is based on the mechanistic account of the war compiled by the German General Staff, which account is conceived of neatly as 'the War against the Herero' and 'the War against the Hottentots'! The question is so important that I shall go over the same ground here once more.

There is no doubt that the most prominent feature of the responses of the peoples who inhabited Namibia at the time of German penetration and conquest was their failure to forge an alliance to oppose the foreigners. (For an earlier version of the following exposition, see Alexander 1982: 6). Nachtwei summarises the view of most historians of Namibia as follows:

> The Herero and Nama peoples could ... only obstruct and delay colonial occupation. They could

> neither prevent nor limit it. For the decisive and historically unavoidable weakness – in the phase of primary resistance – was the fact that their only political perspective was the restoration of traditional pre-capitalist relationships, the fact that beyond the transcendence of tribal barriers for military purposes they were unable to create an all-embracing united front of all the tribal groups opposed to colonialism and organised under one central command. (Nachtwei 1976:49–50)

The decades-long struggle for land and especially for cattle can be seen to lie at the bottom of this failure when one views the question in historical perspective. This struggle was in essence a contest for hegemony between two ruling families bent on creating what we might call a national monarchy. The Orlam Afrikaner clan had made the Herero tributary because of its superiority in weapons and military know-how but with the intervention of German missionaries on the side of the Herero this situation was being altered in favour of the Herero. It would be nothing short of ridiculous were one to deny that Herero- and Nama-speaking people at the turn of the century had a strong consciousness of being different from and often antagonistic to one another. Everything around them: descent, language, mode of production, religion and customs tended to generate and reinforce such a consciousness. However, in dialectical fashion, the very opposite process was taking place at the same time and this process was – paradoxically – accelerated as the conditions for its fulfilment were disappearing. For it was, of course, increased pressure by the German agents of colonialism/imperialism (missionaries, traders, settlers, soldiers, bureaucrats, investors) that forced the traditional leaders of the indigenous people to realise that only unity could give them the strength to resist.

In a formal sense, the germ of Namibian national

consciousness can be traced back to the Peace Treaty of Hoachanas signed in 1858 between Jonker Afrikaner, all the Nama-speaking chiefs except those of the Bondelzwarts (who had not been involved in the previous fighting) as well as by Maharero, two sons of Tjamuaha and by Andries van Rooi, formerly a Commandant of chief Waterboer of the Griqua people (see Goldblatt 1971: 27–28). Although the peace, which was a kind of Namibian magna carta, was broken even before the death of Jonker in 1861, it is absolutely correct to claim that 'it marked the beginnings of a tradition of consultation and negotiation amongst Namibian leaders' (SWAPO of Namibia 1981: 153). There is ample epistolary as well as oral evidence for this view. The most poignant statement is to be found in the now famous and oft-quoted letter of Hendrik Witbooi to Maharero written on 30 May 1890 in which, amongst other things, he says that

> [t]his dry land is known by only two names – Damaraland and Namaland. Damaraland belongs to the Herero people, and Namaland to the Red peoples, both as self-governing kingdoms ... You think you will retain your independent kingdom after I have been destroyed ... but my dear Chief, you will eternally regret your action in having handed over to the White man the right to govern your country. After all, our war is not as serious a matter as you think ... But this thing that you have done, that you are doing, to surrender yourself to the Government of the White man, will be a burden that you will carry on your shoulders ... (Voigts 1929: 77–83)

From this we see clearly that there was a consciousness of being different but also a strong sense of having similar backgrounds and interests as against the German foreigners. Much more empirical research would have to be done in order to establish beyond all doubt just how

widespread and how deep-rooted this 'black consciousness' was at that time. In order to portray the war as a pro-nationalist war of anti-colonial resistance (see below), such a hypothesis is fundamental. Without it, it becomes problematical and contradictory to speak of it as a 'war of national liberation' (see SWAPO of Namibia 1981: 158). Only this hypothesis can explain the enigmatic behaviour of men like Witbooi who, after years of apparent cooperation with the German rulers, struck a blow for freedom in the great uprising.

We know, for example, that Hendrik Witbooi, after 1894, realised that the Germans could no longer be challenged militarily. His original challenge had in any case been based on the belief that all the Nama- and all the Herero-speaking people would be able to unite in opposition to the then small platoon of soldiers sent by the Imperial authorities to protect not the 'natives' as they always maintained but the mining and colonising ventures undertaken by Germans, British and South Africans. This was the reason for the Peace Treaty with the Herero in 1892. But when this broke down and the Khowesin were compelled to capitulate in 1894, Witbooi adopted a conservative strategy of retaining what they had, not provoking the Germans into summary dispossession and resettlement of the Khowesin community. This policy involved them in numerous compromises which were undertaken for the purpose of retaining the semblance of self-government that the treaty with Leutwein allowed for. That Witbooi himself suffered severely under the necessity of making these compromises is eloquently attested in a letter written to the Nama chieftains just before he joined the uprising in October 1904:

> As you know, for a long time I lived under the law, according to the law and ran behind the law obediently, as all of us did, but with the hope and in the expectation that God our father would in the

> fulness of time ordain our redemption from all the misery of this world. For this reason alone did I endure everything that weighed so heavily on my mind. I tolerated it all because I trusted in the Lord. (Quoted in Leutwein 1912: 57)

It seems to me that the most consistent explanation, having regard to everything that we know, is that Hendrik Witbooi could only strike a blow for freedom if he could be assured of the possibility of unity of all the people of central and southern Namibia. It was that stance that led to the capitulation of 1894 and which again made possible the uprising of 1904. There is enough evidence that Witbooi, like Jakob Marengo, realised that within limits the British in the Cape Colony could be counted upon to make things difficult for the Germans and that a protracted war could force the Germans to pull in their horns and to allow the traditional chiefs more land, the people better living and working conditions as well as peace (see Alexander 1982: 15–16; see also chapter 2 in this volume).

We know that Samuel Maharero tried to forge an alliance which was subverted by the machinations of Hermanus van Wyk of the Rehobothers. It is clear that the Herero leadership was appealing to a growing sense of outrage at German atrocities and to a common commitment of the indigenous people to the soil of Namibia. The alliance which Samuel tried to forge was based on considerations of political power. He appealed to those leaders who were pivotal, whose adherence to the uprising would guarantee maximum support for it among the people. It was not based on considerations of so-called ethnicity. The very fact that some Nama-speaking groups (such as the people of Berseba) did not join in the fighting ought to put an end to the attempt to invent an 'ethnic' alliance to explain the conduct of the war. The people of Namibia during the 19th century were organised around Kings, chiefs or Kapteins in sovereign locality or regional groups. These did not

approximate any of the fluid definitions of the concept 'ethnic groups', which has become for the social theory of the second half of the twentieth century almost as dangerous a myth as the idea of 'race' was for the first half of the century. No nation knows this better than the people of Namibia!

Another question that requires to be researched urgently is that of social differentiation within the local groups or polities. We are, of course, not interested in this question in the same static way in which the classical social anthropologists may have been. Our interest derives from the fact that social inequality is both an expression and the source of social contradictions the identification and definition of which enable us to understand and, within limits, to predict the movement of societies, the action of large masses of people.

Already, for example, we have a substantial picture of the social relations within Herero-speaking communities at this time and of the political/economic/social tensions created by the German-imposed Herero paramountcy among chiefs such as Samuel Maharero, Nikodemus and Asa Riarua. We have a less accurate idea of the contradictions between youth and the older people among both Herero- and Nama-speaking groups even though this was clearly at times decisive. An example that springs to mind is the execution of Von Burgsdorff, probably without the consent of Hendrik Witbooi. The strategic interventions of a man like Marengo (see Alexander 1981) would appear to have been possible largely because of an appreciation of this contradiction in that he realised that Witbooi and other traditional leaders would be placed under pressure to act by their own young men if there was a vanguard movement to which they could adhere.

The role of the missionaries, the role of Britain and the Cape Colony, the mechanics of guerrilla warfare (refuge in the Cape Colony, gun running, the provision of supplies),

the role of the northern Owambo-speaking chiefs, all these and more are vital questions that have still to be researched and written up. Drechsler has sketched in outline some of the relevant points but for a historical phenomenon of such magnitude and significance all of these need to become major research areas for students of Namibian history and political economy. Hitherto, only the specifically military aspects of the uprising have been looked at by scholars but the two most recent works, viz., those of Gerhardus Pool and Jon M. Bridgman are written essentially from the ruling class point of view. Pool especially makes no serious attempt to get away from the analytical categories and interests prescribed by their main sources, viz., the reports of the German General Staff and the memoirs and diaries of German soldiers and officers. The less substantial articles written from the side of the people seldom get beyond general references to the intuitive tactical brilliance of the indigenous fighters. Today especially, one would expect that given a fresh approach to the writing of Namibian history, many new kinds of questions could be posed to the sources (both written and oral) and many new facts will be uncovered in the process.

What is its significance in the history of Namibia?

I have referred to the great war of anti-colonial resistance as the central event in the recent history of Namibia. There are three reasons for this judgement.

In the first place, the war marked the final victory of colonialism-imperialism in Namibia. After the suppression of the uprising, the forcible restructuring of property and social relations by the colonial victors was completed rapidly. I shall not trace here the details of the process of legalised dispossession and proletarianisation, the creation of a labour-coercive system through the introduction of

pass laws, curfews, compounds, reserves and all the rest of the accompanying evils of that system, many of which are still very much part of the daily reality of most of the people of Namibia. Much of this material is readily accessible in the standard works on Namibia and other papers in this seminar will cover some of that ground. For our present purposes, the fundamental point is that the defeat of the people's uprising meant that the nature of the class struggle was altered. That struggle would in future be directed willy-nilly to the improvement of the position of the dispossessed and exploited classes within the colonial-capitalist system. New parameters of struggle would emerge, new classes of people would participate in it, a new leadership and new methods of struggle. In this sense, the great war represents a watershed in Namibian history. Before the war, we are confronted with a subjugated people with hardly a semblance of power. The steep ascent from these lower depths is the contemporary history of the Namibian nation.

A watershed is not a void. It is a prominent link between two very different periods of history. The great war is indeed one of the main links between the early resistance to the imposition of colonial rule and the present struggle against South African colonialism and against imperialist exploitation of the colony of Namibia. In the concluding paragraphs of my paper on Jakob Marengo and Namibian history, I analysed briefly the complexity of motives of the leadership and the variety of impulses behind the uprising. Some of these lead directly into the next phase of the struggle which involved amongst other things mass conversions to the Christian Churches, the establishment of rudimentary cultural and educational organisations, petitioning the Permanent Mandates Commission of the League of Nations and various other political and quasi-political activities.

When one takes account of the simultaneity and

interconnections between these actions and the armed resistance one realises that there is indeed continuity, a kind of growing over of one form of struggle into the other with a gradual, often only vaguely perceived shift in the target of resistance. (Alexander 1981: 7).

In the persons of men such as Hosea Kutako and Abraham Morris we have the invaluable link constituted by individuals who played prominent political roles both during and after the uprising. Of course, the great war has also become a source of inspiration for the conduct of the present war of national liberation. People such as the communities at Gibeon and at Hoachanas, to name only two such groups, are mostly firm supporters of Swapo and of the liberation struggle. There can be no doubt at all that as far as the leadership of these communities is concerned, the uninterrupted family traditions that reach back into pre-colonial times are a major source of inspiration for the direction they have chosen at such great material cost to themselves.

From what I have said previously, it ought to be abundantly obvious that the great war was the crucible of Namibian nationality. For the first time in the history of the country, virtually all the people of central and southern Namibia and many of the people of northern Namibia found themselves co-operating directly and indirectly against one common enemy. Many guerrilla groups were composed of individuals and groups who were derived from different language and regional groups. Though it is true that no common national ideology was born out of this, there is no doubt that the idea of a single Namibian nation based on conquest and common oppression emerged from this unprecedented struggle. Though subsequent colonial strategies and practices to a large extent succeeded in submerging and deflecting the development of this proto-national consciousness, the present struggle is, as it were, uncovering it and allowing it to flourish in all respects,

political, socio-cultural and even economic. My own research at present is focussing precisely on the origins of Namibian national consciousness and I have become convinced that we need to examine in great detail the writings of missionaries, traders, bureaucrats, indigenous leaders and colonised agents as well as such oral evidence as we may be able to salvage and to collect in order to establish firmly the extent to which this great Namibian war of anti-colonial resistance represents a major moment in the development of that consciousness.

How have historians written about this war?

The few books that are specifically devoted to any analysis of the uprising are, as I have indicated, without exception lacking in the kind of perspective that would make them useful to people who are concerned with the past for the purpose of understanding and changing the present.

Besides a handful of academic papers, all the works that deal with this subject have been written from a colonial or ruling-class perspective. As such, they are of little use to us. Bridgman's *Revolt of the Hereros*, though it tries to do justice to 'the other side of the hill', fails to ask really penetrating questions, is executed in an extremely eclectic manner and focuses on purely military detail with the result that the texture of those events as social process is lost. Nonetheless, some of his speculations concerning the 'motives, plans and actions of the Herero armies' may prove to be useful to future research workers. The conventional framework within which his work is conceived is clearly manifest in the conventional and misleading nomenclature in which it is expressed.

Drechsler has undoubtedly made the most significant analytical contribution. His access to the Imperial Archives at Potsdam has unearthed valuable information but he has not, I think, been able to introduce much by way of posing

new kinds of questions. Much of his writing displays a certain remoteness from the subject matter as well as a rather mechanical conception of the insurrection as a process. Certainly, central questions such as the nature and even the existence of 'collaboration', 'ethnic groups', strategic insight, goals beyond the mere restoration of the precolonial order are not posed or discussed. However, these remarks would be merely petty were one to deny that his work has not been surpassed. Most subsequent writing on this subject as well as on related questions is nothing more than a gloss on Drechsler's pioneering work.

Lest we do an injustice to historians, let it be said that it is indeed a most complicated and costly undertaking to attempt to write a history involving groups of people who left few, if any, written documents. One can go some part of the way by reinterpreting the written documents of the enemy (in this case, the German army, administration, settlers and missionaries). By bringing to bear a different historical vision, one can pose new questions to these sources and thus uncover new facts. But what one cannot do is to invent concreteness (such as the names, let us say, of Herero or Nama commanders, of women who may have performed important acts of war, of places where certain decisions may have been made, of concrete events that compelled leading individuals to make certain decisions rather than others, and so forth). Such detail is accessible to the historian who uses written documents composed at the time of or shortly after the events concerned. But except where it was crucial to know, the colonial agents seldom took any interest in such details concerning the 'rebels'.

All this leads us to conclude that the historiography of the uprising, like so much else in the Namibian past, is extremely inadequate. An independent Namibia will undoubtedly have to fill in the gaps and rewrite the entire course of the war. Three activities seem to me to be immediately possible:

- More written documents relevant to the war have to be found and published. This applies especially to written documents that emanated from the people (as opposed to the colonial agencies).
- The entire body of documents used hitherto by historians of Namibia has to be reviewed and reinterpreted. This would mean, first of all, the creation of a study group to work out with more precision than I have been able to suggest here which questions are the most relevant ones to pose to the sources from the point of view of understanding and changing the present – always on the premise that historical falsification (whether by omission or by invention of 'facts') disqualifies any so-called historical writing immediately.
- An oral history project has got to be launched. The time will soon be gone when we will be able to obtain from old people (participants or their immediate descendants) the precious information of which they are – often unwittingly – the custodians. We have to train ourselves in the necessary techniques and skills so as to be able to elicit from such people every iota of relevant information in much the same way that an ounce of gold has to be extracted from a ton of ore.

With this three-point plan I conclude my talk and hope that constructive discussion will help us to clarify or to nullify some of the ideas I have raised.

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