Chapter 8

Land, Boreholes and Fences
The Development of Commercial Livestock Farming in the Outjo District, Namibia

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Introduction

This chapter explores the history of commercial agriculture in the Outjo district of northern-central Namibia from the onset of colonisation until the independence of the country in 1990. This is foremost a history of European – or white – livestock farming.[1]

After a short description of the methodology and the field site, I will sketch the progressive European occupation of the land. The economic strategies employed by farmers during the colonial period will be analysed, as well as major challenges, risks and crises.[2] Special attention will be paid to two aspects vital to the history of colonial farming in Namibia: state support to farmers both in the development of farms as well as in times of crises; and labour conditions and labour relations.

This chapter is based on recorded semi-structured interviews with farmers and ex-farmers in the Outjo district and various other key informants, such as extension officers, stock inspectors, and representatives of the Namibian Agricultural Union. Furthermore, informal conversations (especially on more sensitive topics) were also part of the research. I interviewed around forty farmers, ex-farmers and experts between 2005 and 2007.[3] Adult men constituted the majority of my interviewees. Women, as long as their husbands were alive, referred to them and their expertise with regard to the research topic.[4] Earlier research carried out in the region focusing on colonial history with regard to the Hai||om also fed into the present chapter. Additional research was carried out in the National Archives of Namibia on historical developments and in the Windhoek Deeds Office for every farm in the district. The farm registers of all the farms in the Outjo district were consulted to trace the history of settlement, ownership patterns and

transaction sequences. In order to document all the transactions of every farm in the district, a dataset with a list of all the farms in the district was created. This dataset includes the name of the farm, the farm size, the dates of transactions, the full names and the birth dates of the farm owners (buyers and sellers) from the beginning of official transfer.

Due to the quality of the material collected– above all interviews with white commercial farmers – this article reflects their perspective on the settlement process and has to be understood within the socio-political context of independent Namibia. Land reform, land redistribution and land expropriation are major political issues, and white commercial farmers tend to legitimise their one-time role of establishing commercial pastoralism in Namibia.

The Site: A Landscape of Farming Units

The Outjo district covers an area of 38,722 square kilometres and is situated in the commercial farming area in the south-east of the Kunene region, which comprises the entire north-west of Namibia.[5] The mean annual rainfall in Outjo between 1913 and 1998 amounts to 405 millimetres.[6] The town of Outjo has been a municipality since 1944 and constitutes the commercial centre for the surrounding farms. In 2001, the town itself had 6,013 inhabitants[7] while the whole district had 8,947 inhabitants. The main economic activities are nowadays livestock farming, charcoal production and tourism (Anon. 2001). Characteristic of the whole commercial farming landscape in Namibia, the district is divided into farming units, nowadays separated from each other by fences; low fences for livestock farms and high fences for lodges and farms with wildlife.

According to data from the Deeds Office, around 430 farm units were originally given out in the present-day district over a period of around sixty years. The first farms were allotted in German colonial times around the turn of the twentieth century. Around 1960, the entire area had been divided into farming units, with an average size of 5,829 hectares.[8] In 1896, when the Outjo district was established as an administrative unit, it covered a much larger area, including the Kaokoveld (Zimmerer 2000: 27). Many farms in the western part were bought in the 1960s and early 1970s by the government from private owners and allocated to the Damara 'homeland'.[9] These farms have not been included in the dataset since they were situated outside of the present-day district.

From the 430 original farms, 291 have remained basically unchanged in size, 115 have been divided and 54 have been consolidated. Note that farms could be divided and consolidated over the years as well. Indeed, 30 of the original farms were divided and parts were either consolidated with another farm or consolidated with portions of other farms into new farms.[10] Of the original farms, 14 were bigger than 10,000 hectares, and the biggest was 26,107 hectares in size. According to the Deeds Office, no plot given out in the beginning was less than 100 hectares. The town lands had already partly been portioned up and sold in the 1940s and 1950s, and some plots consisted of less than 100 hectares.

According to ownership data provided by the Namibian Agricultural Union (NAU) and the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Forestry (MAWF), the Outjo district consisted of 567 farming units in 2006, a figure which includes the smaller plots of the town lands of the two towns in the district, Outjo and Kamanjab.[11] An average farm was about 4,399 hectares in size. Five farms were bigger than 10,000 ha, the biggest being 34,704 hectares, and 20 farms covered less than 100 hectares. With regard to ownership, 78 per cent of the farms were in private hands, while 8 per cent belonged to the government and 14 per cent were owned by different kinds of companies and corporate entities.

Looking at the history of farm ownership in the district, more than 60 per cent of farm owners were male individuals, with women being owners in less than 10 per cent of cases. Companies were involved in around 12 per cent of farm transactions and the government in around 16 per cent. These figures also include the time after independence in 1990 up until 2006. The developments of land reform changed transaction patterns without a doubt – that is, the government increasingly acts as a buyer of farms in order to use them in their resettlement programme. In retracing the colonial history of white settlement in the district, I next look at how this particular farming landscape came into being.

The European Occupation of the Land

South West Africa (SWA) was officially proclaimed a German protectorate in 1884. A serious move towards expansive colonisation began only after 1894. In 1896, German military stations were erected at Otavifontein, Grootfontein and Outjo (Köhler 1959: 20–21; Dierks 1999: 48). In 1903, the protected area (*Schutzgebiet*) consisted of six districts: Windhoek, Keetmanshoop, Otjimbingwe, Omaruru, Swakopmund and Outjo. The Outjo district was mainly populated by Khoekhoegowab- and Otjiherero-speaking pastoralists and foragers.[12] A few white people from South Africa had already entered the area, also following a rather nomadic lifestyle.[13]

In 1901, only nine farms in the whole district were reported to be occupied by about thirty-nine settlers, originating from Germany, Transvaal, the Cape and England. It was not until the end of the wars of 1904 to 1907 that significant white settlement took place in the entire territory. Indeed, the war and the regulations introduced afterwards (including the expropriation of former 'tribal' land) laid the basis for the establishment of white-settler agriculture (Schmokel 1985: 96). In August 1907 new enactments concerning 'natives' were issued as a direct consequence of the war. Their aim was to order and regulate the 'natives' lives in an autocratic manner. These included the Pass – or Registration – Law (*Verordnung betreffend die Paßpflicht von Eingeborenen*), regulations relating to the 'control' of 'natives' (*Verordnung betreffend Maßregeln zur Kontrolle der Eingeborenen*) and laws relating to labour contracts (*Verordnung betreffend Dienst- und Arbeitsverträge mit Eingeborenen*).[14] The Pass Law required that all Africans over

the age of seven (with the exception of the Rehoboth Basters) had to register with the authorities. They were given a metal badge which served as a pass (and had to be displayed prominently on the person) and a service book (*Dienstbuch*). The law empowered every white person to arrest Africans without passes and to hand them over to the police. The order for the 'control' of 'natives' stipulated that no African could obtain right or title to fixed property, or own cattle and horses, without the consent of the governor. Certain exceptions were made to the ban on the ownership of livestock after 1912. Also, it was also forbidden for more than ten 'native families' to stay on any one farm or property outside the 'native reserves'. The law relating to labour contracts laid down that all 'natives' without visible 'means of support' must be employed (Emmett 1999: 74). These enactments formed the legal framework of German 'native policy' for the remaining time of the occupation. They were evidently aimed at a complete control of the mobility and settlement practices of local inhabitants and went hand-in-hand with the settlement policy with regard to European farmers.

By the end of the German colonial era in 1915, around sixty-seven farms were allotted in the Outjo district (see Figure 8.1, below). Up to then, European settlement in the Outjo district had taken place close to open springs along the main traffic lines, mainly ox-wagon tracks, such as Outjo-Okaukuejo, Outjo-Fransfontein and Outjo-Otjitambi-Sesfontein.[15] Despite the fact that at least approximately 2,700 'natives' were estimated to live in the area of the former district (Külz 1909: 112), the land was not considered to be densely inhabited in the minds of the incoming settlers. The colonisers imported ideals of private landownership and agriculture, which had evolved in the European context, namely the notion of demarcated farms with well-defined borders and incontestable individual proprietors. Land tenure and land-use practices of the former inhabitants did not conform to European concepts, and land was not 'settled' and possessed according to the European understanding. The Germans did not yet have the power to impose their ideals of landownership on the landscape on a permanent basis (see also Silvester 1998: 99), but the landscape's 'emptiness' already helped to justify the European appropriation of the land (see also Botha, this volume).

The system of control, which was intended by the rigid legislation, was never completed during the German period. Due to their high mobility, the population groups falling under the category Bushmen posed a special problem to the administration.[16] Attacks on migrant workers and conflicts with farmers were reported in the district. This had the effect that the police stations of Outjo district were staffed with the highest number of officers (thirty) in the whole territory of SWA.[17]

Under the military rule of the South African era from 1915 to 1918, the legislation with regard to 'natives' was liberalised to a certain degree, since South Africa had a strong interest in the territory and sought to persuade the world that its efforts as a colonising country were justified and that its rule would be far better than that of the Germans. With the establishment of the mandate, South Africa

imported a body of new laws to regulate the flow of labour and to control the indigenous inhabitants (Silvester, Wallace and Hayes 1998: 23). Several proclamations were enacted which played a role with regard to the facilitation of European settlement. The Vagrancy Proclamation of 1920 made it an offence for black people to move around in the police zone unless they could show 'visible lawful means of support'.[18] As with the case of native reserves, this legal tool made provision for the supply of labour to the colony. The 'means of support' were set at either ten cattle or fifty head of small stock. During the South African military period (1915–1918), the Pass Law had apparently made provisions for this matter, and was only now formulated in a proclamation (see also Emmett 1999: 76).[19] The Vagrancy Proclamation was amended further in 1927, and among other things prison terms for vagrancy were increased from three to twelve months.[20] Another important regulation connected to the control of mobility was Proclamation 11 (1927), which sought to prevent squatting by further limiting the number of people allowed to reside on a farm to five 'native families'.

The settlement of land within the Outjo district continued – by and large – from south to north. In 1920, the Land Settlement Act of the Union of South Africa was applied to Namibia with some alterations to meet local conditions.[21] With this, a rapid programme of settlement by white South African citizens began.[22] In the beginning only very poor people ventured into the uncertainties of farming in Namibia, but by 1926 the Advisory Council decided to prohibit the entrance of poor whites as they were considered a drain on resources and tended to be constantly on the move. By the beginning of the 1930s it became official policy to give preference to South West African applicants when farms were allocated (see, e.g., Silvester 1998: 106; Botha 2000).

At least until the 1930s, farm occupancy was not restricted to whites in the Outjo district. Black Namibians were officially allowed to occupy farms, although the terminology differed: farms allotted to black Namibians within the police zone were called reserves. The farm Aimab in the Outjo district, for example, was used as a 'native reserve' until the 1920s.[23] The farm Otjeru was a 'native reserve' from German times until the late 1930s, and included until the 1920s two more farms.[24] The reserve Fransfontein, nowadays outside Outjo district, was also part of the district.[25] In the 1930s, the provisional reserves in the district were dissolved and the inhabitants had to move to Fransfontein, 'native reserves' in other districts, or outside the police zone unless they took up regular employment (Schnegg 2007). However, it is likely that former inhabitants of the district were still able to squat illegally on unoccupied farms or un-surveyed areas, at least for limited periods of time until the area was completely divided into farms, allotted to European settlers and finally fenced in the 1960s.[26]

The European settlement of the district did not progress continuously but rather occurred in surges, dependent on political developments, natural conditions and the development of the necessary infrastructure. In 1928, for example, about 1,900 Afrikaners, who had earlier trekked from South Africa to Angola, were offered the possibility of returning to Namibia. The majority of them were

resettled in the so-called Osire Block, east of Otjiwarongo. By then, farming conditions there were far from what was required to build up successful farms, and the effects of drought and recession in the early 1930s put additional stress on the incomers. Although supported with extra subsidies by the government, their situation did not improve considerably and the administration later decided to resettle them. In the second half of the 1930s the administration made land available in the north-west of the Outjo district for a number of these so-called Angola Boers.[27] In the Annual Report Land Resettlement of 1937, it was mentioned that:

> The rate of progress of land settlement at present cannot be maintained much longer, as most of the land suitable for settlement purposes has been disposed of. There are un-surveyed areas in the Outjo, Swakopmund, Maltahöhe and Warmbad districts which it is proposed to cut up into farms during the course of this year, and these holdings will be made available for settlement purposes. When these have been disposed of there will remain very little land for further settlement.[28]

Despite the findings, that there was little suitable farm land available in the respective areas, a fact that had already been mentioned at the end of the 1930s, more land in marginal areas was made available for settlers until the 1950s.[29]

While the allotment or purchase of farms in the whole territory was put on hold during the Second World War, extensive provision was made after the war for the support of war veterans. Ex-soldiers were given land and could qualify – on recommendation of the Discharged Soldiers' Assistance Board – for additional loans for such things as building houses and to purchase breeding stock. A large amount of land in the western part of the Outjo district – formerly one huge farm of 247,346 hectares – was made accessible to settlers. Aruchab, as the farm was called, had been allotted to the Imperial Cold Storage and Supply Company in 1924.[30] The company had used it for cattle – an inspection report of 17 January 1927, for example, stated that 6,203 cattle were kept on the farm.[31] In the second half of the 1940s, this piece of land was surveyed and divided into about forty farms. Most of them were allotted immediately afterwards. Additionally, part of the Etosha game reserve, which was situated on the northern border of the district, was made available for settlement; boreholes were drilled and grazing licences could be obtained by interested settlers.[32] Apart from the ex-soldiers, settlers from the southern regions of Namibia moved to the district since the south had suffered from enduring drought. The ensuing settlement continued during the 1950s. Mainly formerly landless grazing-licence holders and farmers who were sharing a piece of land with male kin received their own farms during these years. This strategy reflected recommendations of the Long-term Agricultural Policy Commission at the end of the 1940s.[33] Sixty farms in the Outjo district were gazetted in 1951, and fifty-seven farms were gazetted in 1955, most of them in the western part, the so-called Kaross Block. In 1960, 740 surveyed farms were situated in the Outjo district.[34] All the land of the present district had been surveyed and allocated to

settlers by that time. By the early 1970s, 233 farms in the west of the district were cut off and incorporated into Damaraland following the recommendations of the Odendaal Commission and the size of the district decreased a great deal (RSA 1964 [Odendaal Report]: 89). This explains why the district comprised considerably fewer farms in 2006 than in 1960. Later changes entailed mainly the division or consolidation of already existing farming units. Figure 8.1 is compiled from data for every farm in the district from the Deeds Office in Windhoek and reflects the progression of registered farm ownership. The map shows the progress of settlement according to title deed holdings. However, the mapping does not reflect the very dynamic dimension of land settlement. This becomes clear when taking a closer look at the whole process of land allocation under the land settlement programme: after a farm was officially made available for disposal in the government gazette for a period of two months, during which applications on prescribed forms were received, the process went as follows:

> Holdings are allotted for a probationary period of one year or more, and on confirmation of the allotment, a lease, for a period of 5 years, is issued with the option of purchase at any time during this period or a subsequent extension thereof … During the first year of the lease term no rental is payable, but a rental of 2 percent per annum, calculated on the purchase price, is payable during the second and third years, and 3 percent per annum during the fourth and fifth years. Subject to satisfactory development of holdings, remission of rent may be granted to the end of the fifth year of the lease period … [W]hen a lessee exercises his option to purchase, the purchase price becomes payable in half yearly instalments extending over a period of thirty years, interest being charged at the rate of 4 percent per annum.[35]

The official registration of a transaction often took place more than a decade after the first allotment. Moreover, the first person allotted the land was not in every case the first holder of the title deed. Furthermore, the title deeds were sometimes registered much later than the actual transaction took place. Additionally, in the early years of settlement, grazing was often exploited without official allotment, since the existence of unfenced boundaries made trekking rather unproblematic.[36] These circumstances once again provide evidence that the settlement of the area was a rather flexible and partly informal process during the early years. Many settlers did not succeed in making a living on the piece of land they had applied for and left the location voluntarily, sometimes exchanging the farm for a piece of land in another area. Others could not pay back their debts or did not fulfil the conditions under the scheme – for example, permanent occupancy – and had to return the farm to the government. Farms were then gazetted again years later.[37] The reasons for failures were manifold: soil quality, lack of water, lack of capital to invest, drought, personal incapability, or just 'bad luck' (an incalculable combination of different factors).

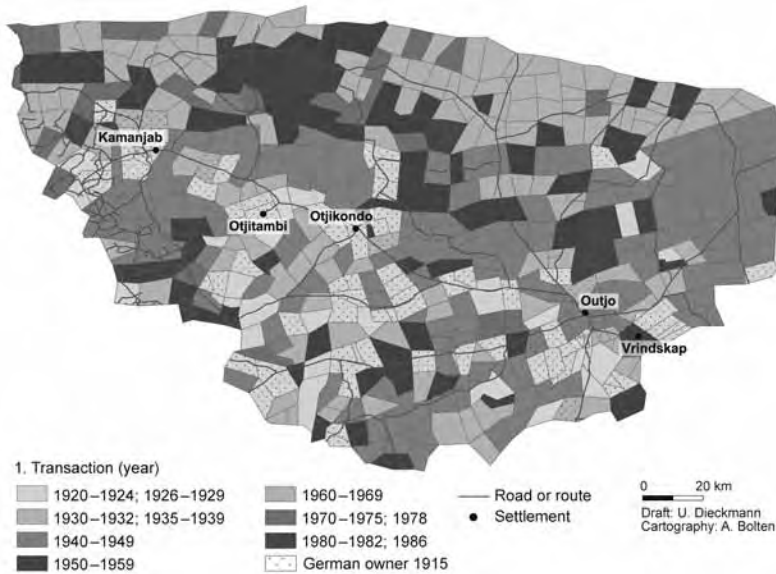

Figure 8.1: First transaction of farm ground (Deeds Office, Windhoek) and German owners in 1915 (G.P. Kruger, 'Outjo 1885–1960, n.d., unpublished manuscript, Swakopmund Library, Namibia).

Two cases are presented here in order to illustrate the process of settlement. The first farmer, O.L., is an Afrikaans-speaking man, who farmed on the border of the Etosha National Park in 2006. The second, E.L., is a German-speaking woman who had farmed mainly in the south-western part of the district during her life.

Case Number 1

O.L.'s great-grandfather came to the Outjo area around the 1850s from the Cape in South Africa. In 1915, O.L.'s grandfather moved to Angola and joined the Angola Boers who had settled there in the twentieth century. O.L.'s father was born in Angola in 1917. In 1927, when the South African administration offered the Angola Boers favourable conditions to start farming in Namibia, the family came back minus their cattle along with many other Angola Boers. They first moved to the Grootfontein area and got some cattle from the administration to start farming. In the mid 1930s, the family moved from there to be with a son-in-law, who farmed in the Outjo district.

O.L. stressed that people moved a lot in former times, they didn't stay long on a farm. 'They stayed at a place for two to three months, then six months at another place. They did not own land. They leased this piece of land and then another piece of land'. The family moved later to another farm, which had been part of the huge Aruchab ranch mentioned above. Although the Deeds Office

data document that Aruchab was officially divided into smaller farming units in 1948, the process must have started earlier. The first development – the drilling of boreholes – had been initiated and grazing licences given out for portions of the ranch by the beginning of the 1940s.

After O.L.'s father got married, O.L.'s father and his family continued to stay and move together with his father's family for a long time. They stayed temporarily on at least three different farms, all part of the Aruchab ranch, until 1948. O.L. himself was born in 1943.

In 1948, two rows of farms were cut off from Game Reserve No. 2 (nowadays the Etosha National Park) and added to the commercial farming area. A drilling machine was pulled through the area and boreholes were drilled about every 5 kilometres. According to O.L., it took one-and-a-half to two months for one borehole (depending on the level of the water table and the soil quality). His father and grandfather applied for one of these new farms. They waited on the neighbouring farm where the brother-in-law was staying until the drilling machine had completed its work. The oldest brother of O.L.'s father also farmed a neighbouring farm.

In 1957, O.L.'s grandfather died and O.L.'s father bought the farm from the grandfather's widow (this is the first entry in the Deeds Office about the farm), and she moved to Outjo. Thus, almost ten years after moving to the farm, the father could farm alone. O.L. went to primary school in Outjo in the 1950s, and later to a technical high school in South Africa. In the 1960s, he worked in South Africa for some years in the construction business, where he met and married his wife. After his return to Namibia, he changed between working for private companies and working with his father for the state, erecting fences in Namibia. At the beginning of the 1970s, O.L. bought the farm belonging to oldest brother of his father, neighbouring his father's farm, with a loan from the Namibian Land Bank. While O.L. was working during the week, his father looked after the farm.

In 1981, after he had paid off the loan for the farm he acquired in the early 1970s, he bought the farm belonging to his father, again with a full loan from the Land Bank. He gave up his non-farming work as a condition of the Land Bank's loan was that he work full-time on the farm. His father sold all his cattle and moved to Outjo. In 2006, O.L. had two farms and was exclusively farming cattle. Between 2006 and 2011, he sold his farms to the government who allocated them to the Hai||om as resettlement farms.

Case Number 2

In 1887, E.L.'s mother was born in Otjimbingue. Her parents were Germans from Westphalia and Silesia, and had a store and a hotel in Otjimbingue.

E.L.'s father P.H. was born in Germany in 1884. He came as a cabin boy to Namibia in 1902, driven by his family's poverty. He went to Otjimbingue where he learnt farming and bricklaying. During the war of 1904 to 1907, P.H. was a soldier and rode patrols in the Outjo area. After the war, he bought a farm in

the south-western part of today's Outjo district from the German government; as a former soldier he obtained favourable conditions. Thanks to his patrols, he knew that there was a natural spring on the farm. It is unknown if the farm was surveyed after he had chosen that area to farm on it or beforehand. According to E.L. he developed the farm, opened the spring with dynamite; later he started to grow wheat and citrus fruits.

E.L.'s parents married in 1910, and in 1918 E.L. was born, the fourth daughter of five children. According to Deeds Office entries, her father bought a second farm in 1928. E.L. went to school in Swakopmund in 1935, after being taught by her mother for some years at home. Around 1936, E.L. went to Germany, where she went to a commercial school and also worked in a hospital and in a mine. In 1938, E.L. returned to SWA. A couple of months later the Second World War broke out. During the war, although most German farmers were in internment camps in South Africa, her father escaped this fate because he was growing cereal and fruit on his farms. As many farm managers were also imprisoned in the camps, E.L. managed her father's two farms during the early years of the war. Being without family on the farm, E.L. had a piano to fight the solitude. Her father was already working a third farm, which was, according to Deeds Office data, officially sold by the government to his wife only in 1944.

In 1941 to 1942, due to a serious drought, E.L.'s father bought farms in the Otavi area, which had formerly been Crown land, from the administration. Following an interview with her, E.L. answered some of my questions in a letter:

> 1941–42 were years of drought, it had just rained 32 mm during the year. All cattle, with the exception of one milk cow and a calf, and all the sheep had to trek via Outjo almost to Otavi, where my father and I had bought three raw farms. This was only possible via another official buyer (since we as Germans were enemies and we were not allowed to buy any land). The farms were only marked on the map, otherwise we had to look for the set *baken*.[38] There was no path, no water, no roof. The sheep trekked behind the cattle. A few days earlier, the drilling machine was pulled by donkeys to our new grazing area. My brother had already gained some experience in drilling. Fortunately, the sites, which had been indicated by the divining rod, proved successful at little depth. The livestock had only to stay for a couple of days on neighbouring farms. We stayed in tents, a matron was our cook. I had to count all the sheep of my father and us, his children. Only after two years, there was again enough rain and grazing that we could trek home again. It was always advisable to have another farm in another area.[39]

During the war, E.L. bought another farm, from a private owner, neighbouring the family farms in the Outjo area with a bank loan. When her father died in 1943, E.L. sold the farm in the Otavi area and paid off the loan on her farm in the Outjo area (according to the Deeds Office, the transaction took place in 1946), and she moved to the latter farm. Her brother started farming at his father's first farm and her mother moved to Schoenau. In 1945, her mother handed over the farm Persephone to her.

In 1947, E.L. married Dr L. who was, according to her, not a 'born farmer'. He had bought a farm a year before. The farm he had stayed on for years, according to E.L., was only officially transferred to him a year after his marriage, according to Deeds Office data. In 1948, E.L. sold her karakul sheep and thereafter farmed mostly cattle and a few goats and sheep. In the 1960s when foot-and-mouth disease and a serious drought coincided, E.L. bought a farm e ast of Outjo (according to Deeds Office entries, the transaction took place in 1974). According to her, it was impossible to lease land during those years. (Supposedly the demand was too high, although other farmers reported having trekked to state-owned land.) Some of her younger livestock trekked to the Waterberg plateau.

In 1979, she transferred the farm east of Outjo to one of her daughters. In 1981 (according to Deeds Office records) her brother sold his father's original farm. In 1982, E.L. sold two farms to her second daughter, who also inherited a farm from her father. In 1984, E.L. sold the farm she had inherited from her late husband to her first daughter.

In 2006, E.L. was partly staying in Swakopmund, where one daughter lived, and partly staying with her other daughter on the farm, which is nowadays used as a hunting farm.

In the context of the Deeds Office records, these cases illustrate the fact that Deeds Office data and actual settlement patterns are far from being consistent. The cases also indicate the almost nomadic lifestyle of some of the early farmers when the land was not completely surveyed and divided into farm units. During these times, farming involved a trial-and-error approach and required moving between various (recently surveyed) farms, a strategy frequently applied by potential settlers in the hope of finding a 'better' farm. Regardless of the high mobility of the early days, both cases furthermore illustrate that mobility – the possibility of trekking – was an important means of maintaining farming operations in Namibia, especially during droughts.

The examples also show the importance of family networks. The joint farming of father and son (with their families) as in the first case was rather the rule than the exception. Both cases demonstrate clearly that farming was an extended family business in which resources – land and livestock – were to a certain degree jointly managed. Selling the farms at a later stage in life to descendants was the way of obtaining a pension. The older farmers then often moved to town, where the infrastructure was better.

Another crucial aspect mentioned in the first case is that the interviewed farmers often started to farm full-time rather late in their lives and that they had temporal or regular employment elsewhere for quite some time. In the next section I will look in more detail at these changing and diversified economies.

Changing Economic Strategies

Although livestock farming remained an important component of the farming sector throughout the twentieth century, the economic strategies employed by farmers changed considerably. From the beginning, it was obvious that the land was mostly suited for animal husbandry. In 1907, Carl Schlettwein, a German farmer from the Outjo district wrote a guide book for incoming settlers, in which he stated: 'It is well known that effective crop production or horticulture can only take place with regular irrigation in South West Africa, the exception being the north of the territory. Therefore, it goes without saying that the settler who is coming as a farmer to South West Africa has to start with animal husbandry for his livelihood' (Schlettwein 1907: 5).

By 1902, about 3,000 cattle were reported to be in the Outjo district.[40] From the beginning, district officers and farmers undertook experiments with breeding to improve the adaptability of the imported foreign breeds, such as Simmenthaler, Pinzgauer, Vogelsberger, Hollaender and Short-horn (ibid.: 77). During the German period, a number of karakul sheep were imported into the country. These were significant in so far as droughts did not affect the karakul economy as much as the cattle economy, since karakul lambs were slaughtered for their pelts directly after birth. As elsewhere, state-run and private experiments with the production of cash crops were started – such as tobacco, cotton and fruit – but by and large they did not meet with satisfactory results. Small-scale horticulture provided vegetables and staple crops for household consumption.

During the South African period, stock farming continued to be the predominant mode of agriculture in the district, and for a long time dairy farming was at least as important as meat production. Still, milk and meat production was for a long time accompanied by horticulture with vegetables, as well as a smaller number of hectares under staple crops, mainly for subsistence. Thus, a certain degree of diversification was evident. Indeed, in the annual report for 1938 of the land branch, it was recommended that farmers should combine karakul pelt farming with the rearing of stock for meat and the production of cream.[41] Farming karakul sheep became increasingly significant from the 1930s on due to international markets and the adaptability of the breed (Schmokel 1985: 100). The dryer western part of the district was especially suitable for sheep, and the majority of farmers also kept karakul sheep. By 1946, karakul pelts made up half the value of the territory's total exports (Emmett 1999: 185). Besides the beef and pelt industry, the marketing of milk and milk products played a vital role in the economy of the territory as a whole and the Outjo district in particular. In the 1930s, butter was not only exported from SWA to South Africa, but also to England, Rhodesia, the Belgian Congo and French Equatorial Africa (Lau and Reiner 1993: 17). Apparently, almost every farmer in the district supplied milk for the market. The lorry transporting the milk served several purposes, as one farmer recollected:

> There was always a lot of excitement when, once a week, the so-called Milch-lorry [dairy lorry] passed the farm. It also brought food and drove further but I don't know where … I don't know how far the lorry went, but it came back later the same way. At that time there was not a lot of traffic, that's why it was always exciting. Is the car coming to the farm or is it just passing? And as a child, I took a lift with the Milch-lorry to the neighbour's farm to play with their kids, and the next day I went back home, with the same lorry, that passed the one day and returned the next.[42]

The dairy economy ensured the farmer with a regular, though small, income, while the beef industry in particular demanded more long-term planning and management of financial resources. Both cheddar and sweet-milk cheese were manufactured by the SWA Cold Storage and Stock Farmers Company in a factory in Outjo (RSA 1964 [Odendaal Report]: 281).

From the 1950s onwards, the combination of various lines of production declined and beef and karakul pelt farming became the dominant strategies. As one farmer told me:

> [I]f you want to produce milk, you've got to have enough green … and energy food (*kraag*). In those days, we did not have it, we could not import it from anywhere. We had to rely on our own natural green grass. And the moment the grass turns yellow, the milk yield of the cows drops dramatically. And … the other problem is a management problem, your cows run all over the farm; you had a few camps there, in which you kept the cows, and during the milking season you had to bring all the cows to your homestead or a central point, and within a couple of weeks there was no grass left around your house. Then the cows had to go long distances in order to get grass. It was difficult to manage the situation. It led to many farms … being overexploited a few kilometres around the house that led to bush encroachment. The bush had no competition from the grass … And you see it [bush encroachment] around many houses … Then, extension services said we have to focus on something else, we don't have the natural resources to sustain milk production. [In] about … 1954, '56 … the government realised it had to encourage farmers to move away from milk production in our area.[43] And from that time on, the creameries and the cheese factories struggled to survive; and even today there are, almost 60 years later on, the dairy farmers in this country, there are about twelve of them left … in the whole country … Anyway, after, I think, 1956 … the emphasis shifted to beef production.[44]

Lau and Reiner speak of 'karakul or meat monocultures – heavily capitalized industrial ranches' (Lau and Reiner 1993: 58), mainly due to South Africa's market interests in the country. Several ordinances were passed by the Administration, following the 1948 Long-Term Agricultural Policy Commission (e.g. the Soil Conservation Ordinance, the Promotion of Farming Interests Ordinance, the Preservation of Trees and Forests Ordinance, all promulgated in 1952) and subsidy policies introduced (e.g. for the establishment of camps, fencing, extra cattle feed), which mainly focused on cattle farming (ibid.: 20). The importance of the dairy industry decreased drastically in the 1960s because of lower dairy production costs and rising beef prices in South Africa (see ibid.). Thereupon,

farmers concentrated solely on cattle and karakul farming. The cheese factory in Outjo hung on, heavily subsidised by the South African Ministry of Agriculture, and operated at a loss until the late 1970s (ibid.: 21).

Prosperous as karakul farming might have been for several decades, it came to an almost abrupt end.[45] With the complete collapse of the international karakul pelt market at the beginning of the 1980s, the majority of farmers switched to beef production only, complemented by a couple of meat sheep as well as goats, mainly for household consumption.[46]

Thus, while in the first half of the colonial period, a diversified farming economy was rather the rule, an increase in state-induced specialisation took place during the second half. This was due to South Africa's interest in the territory, international markets and ecological reasons. However, the shift towards a single economic strategy was never complete. Despite the generous conditions for loans and advances – such as for stock, implements and machinery) – provided for in the land settlement programme (see Schmokel 1985; Silvester 1998; Botha 2000), it seemed difficult if not impossible for a lot of the farmers to develop and maintain their farms without additional income.[47] My interviews with farmers in the Outjo region revealed that many of them earned additional income either temporarily or continuously, especially in times of drought or if they had to pay off loans:

> O.L.: All those years, I wanted to farm. And then [in 1972], I got the chance to buy the farm. I had a little money, all the money I had earned I had invested in cattle already, which I had on leased ground on other farms. I had also leased a piece of land from my father. And in 1972, I made an application to the Land Bank to get a loan to buy the farm. I got it and that was how I got the farm.
>
> U.D.: How did it work with the loan?
>
> O.L.: I got the whole amount from the Land Bank and I had to pay it back annually. It was difficult. I went to work in between. The first ten years I worked.[48] Later I just farmed. But during the time I worked, my father kept an eye on the farm during the week … I had a loan to pay off in twenty-five years. And I needed exactly twenty-five years to pay it off.[49]

Farmers worked as drivers, road construction labourers, cattle inspectors; they built fences, drilled boreholes (when they owned drilling equipment) or helped out on other farms:

> What was a very bad time, during the time of my father, during my childhood, were those extreme years of drought, at the beginning of the 1960s, '63. The extreme drought with the foot-and-mouth disease … I still remember, my father … he had never learnt a real profession; he had been a farm trainee. Now, all the farms were closed! No meat, nothing was permitted to be transported anywhere. Then, the farmers, they had to earn income somewhere … Then the government started to construct a north–south and a east–west fence, through the whole country! A game-

> proof fence, east–west, north–south, to prevent further outbreaks. That time a lot of farmers did the fencing work. A lot of farmers got enrolled in that work. My father got along with the vet at Otjiwarongo and asked him for a job. And the vet said: 'Yes, you can come to work here!' They constituted the vaccination team. They drove through the whole country and worked out programmes. And every single farmer knew at what date the vaccination team was to come to his farm. That day, you had to have all the cattle in the kraal. And every single head of cattle was vaccinated against foot-and-mouth disease.[50]

Some had permanent employment in town and came to the farms only at weekends, leaving the farms to others during their absence:

> W.R.: [In] 1969, I went to Windhoek to start an apprenticeship.
>
> U.D.: To learn what?
>
> W.R.: Kind of diesel mechanic. Panel beater, something like that …
>
> U.D.: Why did you learn that?
>
> W.R..: In order to be able to repair things by myself. I *must* have a profession. My father stipulated it. And I agree. It has to be like that. You need a proper profession. If you are living on a farm and you have extreme droughts, you need to look for work somewhere else.[51]

Challenges, Risks and Crises: 'Starting from Scratch'

During the early period of agricultural development in the Outjo district, the potential settlers – coming from Germany or South Africa – were confronted with an alien environment, unpredictable and highly seasonal rainfall, wild animals, a low population density and not too much visible human impact on the land. In short, many of them thought of themselves as pioneers in a 'wilderness', or what J.M. Coetzee has called 'dream topographies' in which whites converted 'a howling wilderness into the productive garden of settler nationhood', thinking of 'South Africa as a vast, empty space', thereby ignoring former (black) inhabitants entirely (Coetzee, cited in McDermott Hughes 2006: 270).

The major challenge for the incoming European farmers was the development of a farm, which often only consisted of a surveyed area with corner stones or other signs indicating borders, lacking housing and sometimes even without any water:

> U.D.: Thus, your father built up the farm [which he obtained in 1907]. What did it look like in that area, were there farms around?
>
> E.L.: There was just bush. Maybe a path perhaps. Fransfontein was a police station. Otherwise, there were no farms. There was nothing! No fence, no path, no water, no house, nothing! And he lived in a tent in the beginning. And then he started to build. Then he burnt bricks. Clay was there. The oven was still there when I was a kid.[52]

The experience was not too different forty years later in the area, which had just been cut off from the game reserve and opened up for incoming settlers after the Second World War. One difference, however, was that those settlers applying for land during the later period could not choose spots with natural springs; water had to be drilled for:

> We came on the farm in 1947 … There was nothing. The land was not yet surveyed; we had to drill for water every five miles or so. There was no water, nothing. The first night, we slept under a *mopanie* tree; there were spiders, those things, but we slept on stretchers. The next morning we stretched a canvas. But that was the first place, where the drilling machine stopped, where we tried to get water. Unfortunately, the drilling man had drilled crooked. He had to try at another spot again. Later we got another man to drill. And it took us eight-and-a-half months to get the first water! And … you cannot build a house, you can do nothing without water. After eight-and-a-half months, we got the first water![53]

The techniques used to obtain water changed over time. Farmers have vivid memories how wells were dug or how dynamite was used, first by the settlers themselves and later by specialists. *Waterwysers* (experts using a divining rod, as above) as well as geologists were consulted to find the right spots. When the land of the game reserve was cut off and allotted to farmers in the second half of the 1940s, drilling machines were in use (see above).

The construction of houses, drilling of boreholes, instalment of wind pumps, building of dams and camps with the necessary fences for the animals and so on were the first steps to be taken:

> And if you would ask old Gert L. and old Danie de T. [farmers in the same area] … which one was the hardest piece of land on the 'red line',[54] they would without hesitation answer, 'Mooiplaas'; Mooiplaas is the hardest piece of land. I had worked at Graniet [farm], but really, the rock of Mooiplaas is the hardest I have ever encountered. I dug holes there to put in poles for the fence and so on; there are litres and litres of blood from Flip R. [the speaker] round those holes where the poles were put up, and those holes are so deep they look like they have been drilled, but I dug them with my bare hands. Those poles have stood the test of time, they don't move; where they stand, they stand.[55]

Incoming settlers frequently lived the first years in improvised shelters, the development of the other infrastructure – such as that for the livestock – being more urgent.

The defence of the herds – cattle, sheep and goats – against stock diseases, many of which had not yet been clearly defined and could not be successfully combated, was a major problem for the stock farmer. Poisonous plants constituted a further risk for the health of the animals. Archival records give evidence of the difficulties some farmers faced during these early years of settlement. For example, in 1934, a veterinarian visited several farms in the district because the settlers on these farms had formerly complained that their farms were 'unhealthy'

Figure 8.2: An improvised farm settlement at Gamkarab.

and they had asked for land in exchange. The veterinarian compiled a report, documenting the occurrence of poisonous plants on the farms as well as the quality of the soil. He recommended that most farms should just be used for grazing for a couple of months and that some supplements such as calcium phosphate or bone meal should be fed to the animals. In these records both the lack of scientific knowledge about animal diseases such as botulism (*Oesteomalacia*) and the absence of vaccination, as well as some individual farmer's ignorance of available scientific information, is obvious.[56]

> U.D.: And in those times, your father kept the livestock at Success [a farm in another area]?
>
> J: Until 1933, then he sold the farm.
>
> U.D.: Why did he sell it?
>
> J: There was botulism, and there was no medicine against it. He went bankrupt but not officially, he lost all his animals because of botulism since there was no medicine in those times. Lack of phosphate … [T]hat area of Success is called Sandveld, the soil is very sandy; there is little phosphate and the animals don't get enough phosphate and die.[57]

The protection of livestock against wild animals posed a further problem to the farmer. Farmers have vivid memories about the first days of settlement and the loss of livestock due to predators:

> We were the first settlers in that area, the very first settlers. It was still entirely wild. The first night – we had one hundred sheep and four cows – the first night, the lions

> came and killed two of the cows … It was full of lions; when you slept during the night, you could hear them roaming everywhere. Jackals and hyenas as well. That was a wild world … but we were young: I was 17, 18 years old, my brother a bit younger than me. And that was a nice adventure that time … we were unmarried, just the two of us. We lived from meat and *papp* [porridge]; that was our food in those times.[58]

Under such unfamiliar circumstances and conditions of unpredictable and variable rainfall, the support of the state was an important precondition for starting and continuing the farming enterprise.

State Support as a Crucial Given

With the beginning of a systematic settlement policy after the war of 1904 to 1907, the German administration stressed the need for settlers to possess 10,000 marks as start-up capital, temporary housing and the required technical information. Schlettwein (1907: 62–67) calculated in detail the capital needs and profitability of a farm in the first ten years of operation. He stated that a farmer needed 92,000 marks to buy a farm and get it operating immediately, in a way comparable to practices in Germany (with housing, water, 250 head of cattle, 1,000 head of small stock, horses, pigs and chicken). Loans totalling 6,000 marks were provided to such farmers by the German government, to be repaid after six years. Failures were apparently common. In 1913, the Land Bank was established (Botha 2000: 235). The German government – well aware of the capital needs for starting a successful farming operation – was more limited in their financial assistance than the South African administration after 1920.[59]

Throughout the time of the South African administration, state support for commercial farming played a crucial role in the farm economy. With the establishment of the Mandate in 1921, the land settlement laws in force in South Africa were applied to SWA, and a land board was established to smooth the progress of settlement (Emmett 1999: 93). Very generous conditions – such as low minimal capital requirements, loans for building homesteads, advances for camps, kraals, reservoirs and dipping tanks – were provided for new settlers. Besides these general measures aimed at encouraging and facilitating the settlement of white farmers in the country, the state also helped with emergency programmes in cases of severe crisis. For instance, in 1935, after the disastrous droughts of the first half of the 1930s, which coincided with the Great Depression, relief measures were adopted to assist the farmers, such as the remission of interest and rent which became due and payable during the years 1932 to 1934. According to the Annual Report of the Land Branch, the relief measures involved a financial sacrifice by the administration of £144,733. All reductions and remissions took effect from 1 April 1935.[60] In 1952 the Farmers Interests Fund was introduced. It provided measures to combat soil degradation and additional support measures, such as subsidies and loans for dams, boreholes, water installations and fences (Botha 2000: 266). During the major crisis of 1959 to 1963, when the combined effects of prolonged

drought and the outbreak of a foot-and-mouth epidemic affected farming operations in a devastating way, the administration assisted in various ways to buffer these effects, for example, with the provision of money for the repayment of obligations to private creditors and for livestock feed, and special rehabilitation loans for restocking.[61] Also during the serious drought of the early 1980s, which coincided with the collapse of the karakul market and a drop in cattle prices on the South African market, the administration granted comprehensive assistance to farmers (see Schmokel 1985: 106; Botha 2000). Schmokel, who looked into the economy of commercial agriculture in Namibia during colonial times, concluded that 'objectively seen, the farmers as a group, for all their hard work, were pensioners of the state, which placed and maintained them on the land for political reasons' (Schmokel 1985: 106). Not surprisingly, the farmers themselves did not feel like pensioners of the state. In my interviews state support was mentioned in passing without further discussion:

> The state provided the material for the people, to fence the border [with Etosha]. That was 1955 – 1954/55, or 1955/56. That time, the state provided the material, and each Boer put up his fence from corner to corner, the landmarks were already there … The lions had killed the cattle, the Boers shot the lions until 1955/56 when the state provided the material.[62]

> Our farm was close to the red line, the border with Etosha. The biggest problem of course was the lions. The lions came in one night, just a week after – we didn't have anything yet, we didn't have money either – after we had bought twenty-five adult cows, one of them was calving in that particular night. In that night, nine lions came in, and they killed all the cows, twenty-four cows! The one calving was not together with the others. Then my husband went to borrow money from the Land Bank and bought another twenty-five cows and a bull. The third night, after my husband had come back with the cattle, the lions came again. They killed the bull and three of the cows![63]

State support was central to surviving the unpredictable incidences in this unfamiliar country and to achieve success as a farmer. Even so, the interviewed farmers stressed their own efforts to develop functioning farm enterprises as well as the difficulties they faced saving the money to pay back their loans. In short, they focused on the 'hard life' they had to cope with. The favourable conditions and the largely supportive attitude of the state were not really taken into account when these farmers assessed their former situation of farming in Namibia.

A Second Crucial Given: The Configuration of Labour Relations

The second essential precondition for farming in Namibia was the employment of a considerable number of farm workers, often with several families staying on a *werft*, an extra settlement or 'hamlet' on a farm. In the beginning, African people (above all Hai||om Bushmen, Damara and Herero) mainly provided the necessary labour force on the farms. For the early period of German rule,

Schlettwein mentions that strict and fair treatment (combined with the vagrancy laws) helped to ensure that farmers always had enough workers (Schlettwein 1907: 178). Ethnic stereotypes often determined which workers were suitable for specific tasks. Schlettwein recommended so-called 'bastards' – born of Europeans and locals – as foremen (*Vormänner*), Herero as shepherds, while Damara and Ovambo should be used for horticulture, crop cultivation, brick making and so on (ibid.: 175–78).

As early as the late 1930s, with the expansion of farming, especially in the regions where karakul sheep were reared, migrant workers from the north were no longer restricted to the mining sector in the south but were also being channelled into the farming system (Schmokel 1985: 101; Silvester, Wallace and Hayes 1998: 25). Thus, contract workers from the northern regions complemented and partially replaced local farm labourers:

> U.D.: Did you have workers on the farm [where interviewee grew up]?
>
> M.A.: Bushmen, always Bushmen, Herero very few, but no Ovambo. Later we could get Ovambo from Ovamboland but you had to order him [the worker]. He came form Ovamboland to Grootfontein with SWANLA [South West African Labour Organisation, recruiting migrant workers from the north]. He got a card there: Outjo, the Glen [a farm], Otjikondo [area and police station]. And he was without clothes; you had to spend about two dollars for clothes and one dollar for a blanket. And then, he came with his new clothes, shirt and trousers and his new blanket and his card to the farm.[64]

Farms were 'microcosms of Apartheid' (Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 74), small systems in themselves. Some commentators have argued they might best be understood as 'total institutions' with little outside interference, whereby the farm owner was the ultimate authority (du Toit, cited in Suzman 2000: 56). Still, the single-farm system was, of course, never entirely independent from the political conditions under which it had emerged. The concept of *baasskap* is crucial to the understanding of social relations on farms in the entire region of Southern Africa (e.g., Guenther 1986; van Onselen 1992; Sylvain 1999; Suzman 2000). Guenther characterised *baasskap* as 'European economic domination combined with the racist values and practices of Apartheid' (Guenther 1979: 135). The institution of *baasskap*, with the concentration of patriarchal power in the hands of a single *baas* 'father figure', enabled the farmer to exercise a great deal of personal power, shaped by a paternalistic stance often combined with racial-evolutionary attitudes about the various degrees of civilisation in regard to the ethnically heterogeneous farm labourers (Sylvain 1999: 227). The farmers understood their role with respect to their workers as comprising one of training, education, assistance and, in the final instance, punishment and discipline.

With progressive settlement, farm work became one of the very few options for making a living for many local Africans. Labourers were expected to undertake a wide variety of skilled and unskilled tasks. These included working with

livestock (for example, herding, milking, feeding), agricultural activities (such as planting and harvesting maize), garden work, construction and maintenance (especially fencing). Local women meanwhile were mostly engaged in domestic work. Remuneration for migrant workers was prescribed at fixed rates, consisting of a balance of rations and wages. Remuneration for local workers was more flexible, sometimes nothing more than small rations of food and tobacco.[65] Low payment was often justified in terms of workers' alleged laziness, especially that of Bushmen farm labourers. The most common ration package included weekly (or daily) supplies of mealie (maize) flour, sugar, coffee or tea, tobacco, sometimes milk and occasionally meat. Reliable local workers who had been on the farm for over a year were sometimes given livestock by the farmers as a bonus.

Due to the size of farms, farmers were highly dependent on their farm workers. Shepherds in particular were essential for successful farming operations. The strategies farmers used to keep their labour force operating differed considerably, and behaviour varied: corporal punishment or threats of it on the one hand were common; handing out benefits (better rations or salaries) and efforts to create a relationship of mutual trust were used as motivating methods on the other.[66] The 'reliability' of farm workers varied to a similar degree. They had some – albeit very limited – means for coping with the situation on farms. High mobility, theft and slaughtering livestock, shirking and refusals were part of the repertoire.[67]

In my interviews, farmers talked about their workers mainly in terms of complaints about them, often expressed along ethnic lines. Anecdotes about the funny, stupid or troublesome behaviour of individual workers were prevalent too. Thereby, ethnic stereotypes about farm workers were widespread but by no means consistent. It appears that they were rather drawn from personal experience with particular individuals and generalised according to ethnicity. The importance of farm workers and farmers' evident dependency on them were not mentioned. The topic was presumably avoided in order to prevent awkward discussions of unequal power relations.

Notwithstanding the favourable conditions white farmers enjoyed regarding applying for loans and subsidies, as well as the availability of a cheap labour force, farming in the Namibian environment remained a difficult and risky enterprise over the years.

Help Mekaar: Farmers' Associations and Support Networks

Social networks played a crucial role in providing assistance to farmers. The low population density combined with the effects of the Apartheid system, which restricted contact with non-white people, were factors which – along with the vulnerable condition of the farming system – augmented the significance of mutual assistance between farmers. Due to the long distances to the nearest town and the lack of infrastructure, one's direct neighbours were an important source of help on the farm with regard to transport and sharing information.

Networks between members of the same language or cultural group – Germans on the one hand, Afrikaners on the other, as well as a few English-speaking people – were the closest. Political affiliations also played a role. Some Afrikaners had left South Africa after the British victory at the beginning of the twentieth century and felt closer to the Germans:

> There was one common factor, and that was that most of them were Afrikaans speaking. And the division was not so strong along those lines then. But before the Second World War, you had the two separate strong opposing groups, the pro-German and the anti-German. The pro-German were not always so much pro-German than they were sometimes more anti-English … and therefore they had left South Africa because they did not like the English colonisation of South Africa.[68]

Most Germans could speak Afrikaans and most Afrikaners could at least understand German, and the dependency on neighbours was considerable. Language boundaries were permeable and networks (sometimes also marriages) cut across these boundaries.

The most institutionalised organisations were the local farmers' associations (*Boere Verenigings*, *Farmervereine*).[69] In the Outjo district there were at least five farmers' associations.[70] Most, if not all, of the farmers were members of a farmers' association. First of all, the regular meetings of farmers' associations served predominantly for information exchange. National and international experts were invited to inform them on specific topics, such as stock breeding, veterinary recommendations, rangeland management and so on. Alternative access to new information and the latest research results – either through regular visits to town and mouth-to-mouth diffusion or via newspapers, the internet and so on – was limited in former times. The farmers' associations were members of the Namibian Agricultural Union (Namibian Landbou Unie). They constituted lobby groups and also held political sway. Additionally, the associations were mutual support networks. The members were organised and prepared to help each other. For example, there was a clear allocation of responsibilities and obligations in the case of bush fires.

The Predictably Unpredictable: Droughts and Ways of Coping

Over the years, droughts have been one, if not the, major risk for livestock farmers. According to the interviews, the worst droughts before independence remembered by the farmers were those of the early 1930s, which coincided with the Depression, the drought at the end of 1950s and beginning of the 1960s, which was accompanied by an outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease in the second year, and the droughts in the early 1970s and the early 1980s.[71] As rainfall is very patchy in Southern Africa, it could happen that a farmer received almost no rainfall in one year while a neighbour had sufficient rain, a major risk typical for freehold farmlands in arid regions. Working temporarily to earn additional

income and selling cattle during drought periods (since the grazing was not sufficient) were common strategies employed by farmers. Because prices were low, selling cattle during droughts meant a considerable loss for farmers. Those farmers, who produced oxen for the meat market, were frequently forced to sell their oxen and had to start the whole production cycle from scratch.

> W.B.: I farmed with oxen. The drought forced me to sell the oxen, I had to sell all of them, just the cows were left over. That was around 1980. Then I started again to raise oxen [it takes some years for the oxen to reach the required size], then again there was a drought. I had to sell and sell and sell again. And I'm not yet back to oxen.
>
> U.D.: Is that a cycle which repeats again and again?
>
> W.B.: Yes. Okay, you can survive a drought with oxen, but then you need to lease additional grazing. Otherwise it doesn't work, you *have* to sell.[72]

The movement of livestock to other areas was one strategy for coping with the lack of rainfall (see above). During drought periods, a considerable number of farmers trekked to un-surveyed Crown land and other areas, such as east of Kamanjab, east of Grootfontein and the so-called Mangetti Block, as well as to the Etosha game reserve (for example, in 1962), sometimes trekking over several hundred kilometres. The outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease at the beginning of the 1960s during the time of a severe drought had the disastrous consequence that farmers were neither allowed to sell nor to move their cattle anymore. Those who had their cattle at emergency grazing places in other areas had to stay there until the outbreak was under control.

Trekking was not without risk, and some farmers reported suffering from a considerable loss of animals, in particular due to poisonous plants in the respective area.[73] This is one farmer's recollection of the situation in 1959:

> M.A.: [B]ecause of the drought, all the people from the Outjo area trekked to the government farms at Grootfontein.
>
> U.D.: All the farmers?
>
> M.A.: Many farmers. My brother and I as well. We went with sixteen-hundred head of cattle to Grootfontein and came back with thirteen-hundred.
>
> U.D.: Why?
>
> M.A.: Poisonous plants. *Maakgou* [*Dichapetalum cymosum*, Gifblaar family]. The cattle born in that area, they did not feed on those plants, they knew. But incoming animals, it is poison for the heart. That *maakgou* and the lions, there were many lions catching the cattle in that area. There were a lot of lions and no fences. Our Bushmen workers had to move behind the cattle the whole day long, so that the animals could eat, and they had to bring them back to the kraal in the evening again.[74]

Trekking was done on foot, with lorries and, sometimes, partly by train. At times, emergency grazing was supplied by the government on un-surveyed Crown land.[75] On occasion, farmers hired grazing from private owners.

> U.D.: What else did you do during droughts [except getting employment]? Did you also lease grazing?
>
> W.R.: Yes, I also leased. Seven years in the 1980s. Seven years, I did not have a single head of cattle on this farm![76]

In retrospect, droughts were perceived as the main risk, threatening the whole business of a farmer, which could force the individual farmer to start from scratch again with regard to livestock. Other risks were particular to specific periods of time. Just to mention a few: The instability of markets for some products such as karakul pelts was one of them, changing over time. The Namibian liberation war also had some impact on farming, and the entrance of SWAPO (South West African People's Organisation) liberation fighters into the farming area was perceived as a risk during the 1970s and 1980s, though some areas in the Outjo region were less affected than others.[77] Bushfires constituted another risk. Fire breaks and cleaning bush around dwellings, as well as the tough organisation of farmer networks to help each other, were parts of the coping repertoire. The major crises were a combination of droughts and other political, ecological or economic factors.

Consolidation and Thereafter

During the years of settlement, adaptation to the unfamiliar environment progressed. Veterinary services had already been established in the early years to deal with animal diseases and related problems (RSA 1964 [Odendaal Report]: 269). With increasing scientific knowledge, medication and vaccination became available. For instance, according to the interviewees, vaccination against botulism (*Lamsiekte* in Afrikaans), one of the major threats to livestock, became available in the early 1940s. Stricter legislation and control measures with regard to foot-and-mouth disease also showed its effects after the outbreak of the disease at the beginning of the 1960s. The development of infrastructure on farms helped farmers in many ways. Fences and/or keeping guard helped to protect livestock against wild animals. Improved rangeland practices – the camp system – replaced the former free-run system (Bähr 1968: 73).

Archival material, including correspondence between farmers and the Land Branch of the administration for instance,[78] gives evidence of the struggles farmers went through to build up their farm from scratch and to pay back their debts. Also, the frequent changes in farm ownership evident in the title deeds data indicate that many farmers indeed failed in their attempts to build up a sustainable farming business. The return of one farm to the government and the leasing or

buying of another one, also visible also in Deeds Office data, was another attempt to survive as a farmer during the early years of settlement when farmland became progressively opened up for settlement. Interviewees also stressed the thread and existence of failure:

> You have to make plans, how to survive, how to cope. Making plans, otherwise you get stuck. Not all farmers pulled through. Maybe around twenty started to farm at the same time as me. I don't believe that more than ten survived as farmers. The others left the farms, were seeking employment – the ones worked here, others worked there, road construction for example. They simply could not make it. If you don't have the ability to adapt, if you are not able to make a plan, then you'll sit there afterwards.[79]

Reasons for failure or differences in performance and varying degrees of success in farming were due to the dynamics of manifold aspects. A lack of knowledge of the environment and less favourable conditions regarding soil, water availability, poisonous plants and so on, and hazards such as droughts and animal diseases, were important factors. Access to financial and physical capital and the personal characteristics of individual farmers, such as long-term planning skills, agricultural knowledge or experience, constituted further vital factors. Especially at the beginning, for many farmers the most urgent problems concerned their daily needs. Thoughts concerning longer-term issues were barely on the agenda; long-term planning was often not possible. Therefore, a solid portion of 'luck' was important at the beginning.

Those people who continued to subsist as farmers had 'adapted' to the alien environment, they had appropriated and cultivated the wilderness and had developed strategies to cope with specific risks and crises. According to my understanding, the concept of adaptation is central to many farmers' ideas of how to survive. It implies a considerable degree of flexibility for reacting to unpredictable or unexpected events and crises. During the colonial period, the segregationist system, and later Apartheid, formed the essential background for the successful operation of farming in offering generous assistance to farmers on the one hand and providing cheap labour on the other.

With independence in 1990 and the termination of Apartheid legislation, major changes in the political economy of Namibia occurred that had profound effects on white – previously advantaged – farmers. Most importantly, key shifts took place in policies regarding land and commercial agriculture. With the implementation of the Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act of 1995 (since amended several times, most recently in 2003), and the formulation of related policies, such as the National Land Policy of 1998 and the National Resettlement Policy of 2001, the new government has tried to address the inequitable ownership of commercial land. The most essential component of the Land Reform Act for already operating commercial farmers is the provision that any commercial farm offered for sale has to be offered to the government for the purposes of resettlement first (LAC 2005: 6). Furthermore, the Act, as amended

in 2003, prescribes that any farm identified as suitable for the resettlement of the landless and poor may be expropriated following certain procedures (see ibid.: 18–19). Although expropriation up to 2007 was limited to three farms,[80] it is perceived as a new risk by many farmers. The passing of the Labour Act (1992) also played a crucial role in these changes.

A lot of established white farmers find it difficult to adapt to the new circumstances. Above all, land reform is still in progress and the objectives are overambitious and not well defined. Additionally, land reform lacks a systematic approach in various aspects, as well as transparency.[81] Thus, it is difficult for farmers to anticipate which specific circumstances they have to adapt to. During all periods, unpredictability causes the most stress. On the other hand, the problem of adapting is at times also due to the observable defiance of some farmers, with their specific political opinions and glorification of the past.

Conclusion

It should have become clear that the European appropriation and cultivation of land in the Outjo district – and to some extent this holds true for the whole country – was a major challenge for the new settlers and, from the current perspective, is presented as an important achievement. Dangers and risks in colonial times mainly concerned struggles with nature, droughts, animal diseases, bushfires and so forth. The whole settlement process took place in an unfamiliar environment for each and every farmer,[82] and involved new diseases, new grazing conditions (including dangerous plants) and the extreme unpredictability of rain. It was mainly approached with a trial-and-error attitude, an approach which was – due to colonial interests and policies – possible during the early years of European settlement when land for settlement was still abundant and when the state played a crucial role in assisting white farmers.

Later on, the unfamiliar became familiar. Those who survived as farmers found ways to adapt to the new situation and to cope with regularly occurring risks. Over the years, farmers learned to anticipate and to prepare. The crucial role which structural factors played in supporting people's coping strategies (in particular, state support and legislation) was rather neglected by farmers of European origin during the interviews. This is due to the current position of European farmers within independent Namibia, where affirmative action for formerly disadvantaged people is promoted and taken. The previously 'advantaged' farmers have an interest in stressing that they were not as previously 'advantaged' as they are perceived to have been by the rest of the Namibian public. They are keen to ensure that it is acknowledged that they built up their farms with their own hands and did not get everything for free during the periods of German and South African rule. They are in a position in which they need to justify their right to possess a farm.

Notes

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1. I will use the terms 'white' farmers or settlers and settlers of 'European origin' synonymously here, including the 'whites' who came to Namibia from South Africa. During colonial times, and especially during the Apartheid Era, skin colour was a distinguishing feature of politics and society. Nowadays, the terms 'previously advantaged' or 'established' farmers refer to the same group of people. Opposed to these are the 'previously disadvantaged', 'emerging' or 'black' farmers.
2. For an overview of definitions of risk, see Bollig (2006).
3. Transcripts from these interviews are cited below; all translations are my own.
4. Remarkably, the 1952 farm register contains 137 women (14 per cent of all cattle brand owners) who had their own brands at their disposal, compared to 849 men. I did not get to know any women who had not been married running and owning a farm of their own, although widows or divorced women sometimes continued to manage the farm after their husband had died or had left.
5. The data on the area of Outjo district comes from: http://www.statoids.com/una.html (retrieved 5 April 2007).
6. Data provided by the Meteorological Service of Namibia, Windhoek.
7. Population figures are drawn from the National Planning Commission's data set from 2001 (http://www.npc.gov.na/census/census_localities.htm, retrieved 5 August 2004).
8. It is difficult to calculate a precise number with respect to the first farming units. Farms were allotted gradually, and it might be that when the last farm in the district was allotted some of the first farms had already been divided or consolidated. Thus the number does not refer to an exact date but to the first farms and the size of these.
9. This was done following the plans of the Odendaal Commission, which aimed at a spatial segregation of the various ethnic groups in Namibia, similar to the Apartheid system in South Africa; see RSA (1964) [Odendaal Report].
10. It would go beyond the purpose of this chapter to analyse changes in colonial and postcolonial land and settlement policy to explain these consolidations and divisions.
11. Plots are small allotments, situated on town lands, the latter falling under the Local Authorities Act (1992); rules and regulations are determined by the municipality or the town council. Farming units fall under the Agricultural (Commercial) Land Reform Act (1995, amended several times since then).
12. For a settlement history of the Fransfontein area, which was originally part of the district, see Schnegg (2007).
13. Swakopmund Library, Namibia (SL), G.P. Kruger, 'Outjo 1885–1960' [unpublished manuscript] (n.d.), p.15.
14. National Archives of Namibia (NAN), ZBU W III A.1.
15. See the 'Kriegskarte von Südwestafrika', originally published in 1904 and republished in 1994 by the NAN.
16. Nowadays, the groups formerly called Bushmen are referred to as San in official discourse.
17. NAN, ZBU WII O2, Landespolizei Windhoek an den Kaiserlichen Gouverneur, 15 April 1912.

18. Under German rule, police protection was confined to those areas falling within the sphere of influence of the railway lines and main roads. The 'police zone' separated those parts of Namibia that were being progressively settled by white farmers from those areas where indigenous land-use systems were left largely intact; these included the Kaoko, Ovambo, Kavango and Caprivi regions (Werner 1993: 139). Under South African martial law, Proclamation 15 of 1919 was issued, proscribing the crossing of the line marking the border of the police zone without official permission. This became known as the 'red line'. The boundary shifted numerous times during the period of South African rule as white land holdings in the north-central areas expanded (Silvester, Wallace and Hayes 1998: 3). For a history of the 'red line', see Miescher (2009).
19. Referring to 'the means of support' at the 1923 Permanent Mandates Commission meeting of the League of Nations in Geneva, Lord Lugard, the British colonial administrator and member of the Commission, remarked that this meant that all 'Bushmen' were de facto vagrants and thus subject to forced labour (Gordon 1998: 52).
20. NAN, SWAA, A50/27, Proclamation No. 32 (1927).
21. The Proclamation of 1920 was replaced by the Proclamation 310 of 1927; see Deutsche Uebersetzung des ausserordentlichen Amtsblattes fuer Südwestafrika, Windhoek, 22 December 1927.
22. This option was only open to poor people. One could also acquire a farm through the Land Bank, whose interest rates were slightly higher, or by private purchase (Botha 2000: 249).
23. NAN, LAN 579, 1379, Klein Omburo nr. 148, Outjo: General File, 18 August 1920, Magistrate, Outjo, to Secretary, Windhoek.
24. See Miescher (2006) for more details, including the prosperity of the farming business in the reserve.
25. Fransfontein (initially 10,000 hectares, later increased to 36,188) was one of the smaller 'native reserves' (RSA 1964 [Odendaal Report]: 69; Werner 1998: 79); many others covered several hundred thousand hectares (for example, Berseba, Epukiro, Aminuis, Otjohorongo) before the reserves were consolidated into homelands following the Odendaal Commission (RSA 1964 [Odendaal Report]).
26. For an example of illegal squatting in a neighbouring district, see Dieckmann (2007: 139–43).
27. NAN, LAN 1/1/89 31, 53 vol. III: Annual Reports Land Settlement.
28. See the Annual Report Land Resettlement of 1937
29. For more details, see Miescher (2009: 265–336).
30. In 1922, Imperial Cold Storage concluded an agreement with the SWA administration for the erection of cold storage works at Walvis Bay. In terms of the agreement, the latter was granted the sole right concession for the export of livestock for three years in addition to a fifteen-year term to export meat from the cold storage works. The SWA Cold Storage and Stock Farmers Company was a subsidiary of Imperial Cold Storage's farming and manufacturing operation. See Rawlinson (1994: 182).
31. NAN, LAN 957, 3082.
32. Grazing licences could be obtained from the local magistrate to graze animals on named segments of Crown land within each district, and these were issued on a monthly basis. The number of livestock was stipulated in the licence and the costs of these varied accordingly (Silvester 1998: 102; Miescher 2009: 270).
33. NAN, LAN 1/1/89 1534, file 4649.
34. NAN, LAN 1436, 4293, vol. III, IV.

35. NAN, LAN 1/1/89 31, 53 vol. III: Annual Reports of the Land Branch of the Administration.
36. For southern Namibia, see Silvester (1998: 105).
37. Boskop farm, for example, was gazetted in 1927 and again in 1937. The later owner had a grazing licence from 1935. The government title deed was finally issued in 1953 (NAN, LAN 1047 3365/1, Boskop, No. 235).
38. *Baken* were signs, used in the early years, to mark the corners of the farms. The proportions and material of these were exactly determined in Proclamation 78 (1920), 'Deutsche Uebersetzung des Amtsblattes für das Schutzgebiet von Süd-West Afrika', Windhoek 28 February 1921, p.44.
39. Letter to the author, January 2007.
40. SL, Kruger, 'Outjo 1885–1960', p.16. It is not clear if the number refers to cattle belonging to European farmers only or to Africans as well.
41. NAN, LAN 1/1/89 31, 53 vol. III: Annual Reports Land Settlement.
42. Interview with I.B. (b.1935), 9 May 2006.
43. Apparently this was not limited to the Outjo district. See Lau and Reiner (1993: 22) for a discussion of the political motives behind this national move.
44. Interview with J.B. (b. 1943), 24 August 2006.
45. Karakul fleeces received some bad press in Europe and the US at this time.
46. In recent years the karakul economy has grown; see, e.g., coverage of this in the *Economist* (http://www.economist.com.na/content/view/702/53/, retrieved 13 November 2008).
47. Interest rates were set at 4 per cent, compared to rates of 11 to 12 per cent offered by private banks; the purchase price had to be paid back in thirty years (NAN, LAN 1/1/89 31, 53 vol. III: Annual Reports Land Settlement).
48. O.L. worked for a South African construction company which had a branch in Namibia as well.
49. Interview with O.L. (b. 1943), 11 November 2006.
50. Interview with H.R. (b. 1949), 22 August 2006.
51. Interview with W.R. (b. 1949), 22 August 2006.
52. Interview with E.L. (b. 1918), 12 July 2006.
53. Interview with B. de B. (b. 1922), 1 November 2005.
54. This particular farm borders the 'red line' which in this part of the country is also the border of Etosha National Park.
55. Interview with F.R. (b. 1929), 22 June 2006.
56. NAN, LAN 579, 1378/2 (vol. II), Aimab No. 124, Outjo Allotment File, ceded to V.G. Harding.
57. Interview with J.L. (b. 1929), 22 May 2006.
58. Interview with W.B. (b. 1917), 20 October 2005.
59. Among other policies, the South African administration sought to solve the 'poor white problem' in South Africa with its settlement programme in Namibia. At least at the initial stage, little emphasis was put on ensuring that these emigrants became successful farmers in the mandated area.
60. NAN, LAN 1/1/89 31, 53 vol. III: Annual Reports Land Settlement.
61. E.g., NAN, LAN 53/1, Budget Speech 1961, 1962; see also Schmokel (1985: 105). In 1961, a cordon fence of 2,720 kilometres was erected within seventeen months by farmers and farm workers. The administration supplied the materials (Rawlinson 1994: 98).
62. Interview with O.L. (b. 1943), 11 November 2005.

63. Interview with B.B. (b. 1924), 1 November 2005.
64. Interview with M.A. (b. 1938), 3 November 2005.
65. E.g., NAN, LGR 3/1/7 2/20/9, Magistrate, Grootfontein, to the Secretary for SWA, Windhoek: Annual Report on Native Affairs, 1946. There is no reason to believe that the situation in the Outjo district differed from that in the neighbouring Grootfontein district.
66. For the relevance of trust in the principal–agent relationship, under which the farmer–labourer relation can be subsumed, see Ensminger (2001).
67. For more details, see Dieckmann (2007: 217–30).
68. Interview with J.B. (b. 1943), 24 August 2006.
69. Farmers' associations have a long tradition. The first was established in 1898 with its headquarters in Windhoek and had branches throughout the territory (Rawlinson 1994: 20).
70. Geographical area was the central criterion for the various farmers' associations; thus they were also neighbour associations.
71. These must have been the most devastating droughts in the territory (Rawlinson 1994: 98–100, 138).
72. Interview with W.B. (b. 1945), 22 November 2005.
73. This was reported by a number of my interviewees. See also, e.g., NAN, LAN 1/1/89 53, Annual Reports Land Branch, vol. 5.
74. Interview with M.A. (b. 1938), 3 March 2005.
75. E.g., NAN, LAN 1/1/89, SU 32, 53/1, Budget Speech. The administration's general policy of keeping farm land for emergency grazing was already under pressure in the 1940s (Rawlinson 1994: 24). However, in 1959 emergency grazing was provided to farmers (NAN, LAN 1/1/89 31, 53 vol. III: Annual Reports Land Settlement, Afdeling Lande: Statistike I.V.M. Droogtetoestande, BL. 103, Tydperk 1 January 1959–30 November 1959).
76. Interview with W.R. (b. 1949), 22 August 2006.
77. SWAPO fighters had special 'corridors' when entering the police zone from the north. The area immediately south of the Etosha Pan was reportedly less affected than other areas. Again, social networks played a crucial role in this regard. So-called commandos were called upon to assist farmers, on whose farms liberation fighters had been reported.
78. NAN, LAN 579, 1378/2 vol. 1, Aimab 124, J.A. Lindeque, Allotment file.
79. Interview with W.B. (b. 1917), 20 October 2005.
80. See Harring and Odendaal (2007) for an analysis of the expropriation process.
81. For further detail on the progress and problems of land reform, see Dieckmann (2011).
82. This also holds true for those South African farmers who tried to start from scratch in Namibia – the circumstances were not familiar either to them or their animals.

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