

ON BECOMING A CHIEF IN THE KAOKOVELD, COLONIAL NAMIBIA, 1916–25*

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ABSTRACT: In 1916 a warlord named Oorlog – ‘war’, in Afrikaans – moved into the Kaokoveld in the far north-west of what is now Namibia, and drove off the original inhabitants. Shortly after, Oorlog was formally recognized as a chief by the newly established South African administration and elevated to the highest position of power in the Kaokoveld. This article, through investigating how Oorlog came to be elevated to this position of power, explores issues of colonial governance and personal relationships. By focusing on the micropolitics of the Kaokoveld, it emphasizes how interpersonal relationships – not bureaucratic structures – were of crucial importance in the establishment and maintenance of early colonial rule in Africa.

KEY WORDS: Namibia, southern Africa, chieftaincy, colonial intermediaries, military.

IN late 1916, a small band of raiders closely pursued by a Boer commando fled across the Kunene river from Angola into the Kaokoveld in the far north-west of what is now Namibia. Led by a warlord aptly named Oorlog – ‘war’, in Afrikaans¹ – this small band drove out the original inhabitants and established a new base for themselves in the Kaokoveld.² Within a year of their arrival, Oorlog had been formally recognized as a chief by the newly established South African colonial administration and was elevated to the highest position of power in the Kaokoveld.

When considering the arrival and almost immediate rise to power of Oorlog, one is left wondering how it was possible that this man, a warlord without traditional legitimacy, could become a highly respected chief in the

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¹ The man known as Oorlog had a number of names. In the Herero language, Oorlog is referred to as Vita Harunga, in which ‘Vita’ is the Otjiherero word for war, and ‘Harunga’ refers to the matrilineal descent of Vita. Oorlog is also referred to as Vita Tom, in which ‘Tom’ refers to his patrilineal descent from Tom Bechuana, his father. Here, I use the name Oorlog, although I do on occasion use his other names when the situation demands.

² Today, the Kaokoveld is well known among tourists visiting Namibia as the ‘home’ of the allegedly primordial Ovahimba. On the history of the Kaokoveld and the construction of the Ovahimba as ‘untouched primitives’, see M. Bollig, ‘The colonial encapsulation of the north-western Namibian pastoral economy’, *Africa*, 68:4 (1998), 506–36; and M. Bollig, ‘Framing Kaokoland’, in W. Hartmann, J. Silvester, and P. Hayes (eds.), *The Colonising Camera: Photographs in the Making of Namibian History* (Cape Town, 1998), 164–70.

colonial administration. Part of the answer lies in the fact that his arrival in the Kaokoveld coincided with the establishment of South African rule in what had been German South West Africa. In seeking to administer and govern this immense territory, the new administration aimed to define, formalize, and establish structures of control.³ However, Oorlog did not merely become a chief because the incoming administration needed reliable agents. As an intelligent and astute politician, he successfully manipulated the views and attitudes of the new administration to his advantage. It was Oorlog, with no prior right to a position of governance in the Kaokoveld, who used the South Africa administration to legitimize his position there. To do this, he depended upon the manner in which he presented himself, and on the interpersonal relationships that he was able to build and develop with individuals representing the colonial state, most importantly Major Manning and his successor, Major Hahn.

One of the primary characteristics often attributed to the turn from mercantilism to formal colonial rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is the replacement of interpersonal contacts with bureaucratic relations in which the written directive is paramount. Thus, in theory, colonial officials could be transferred and replaced without the system of colonial governance changing; colonial peoples could drive off or even kill an unpopular district commissioner, but within the logic of the bureaucratic system every official was replaceable, and every official (killed or otherwise) would, again in theory, be replaced by another official who would then seek to implement the policies and directives that his predecessor had failed to establish. This article explores such issues of colonial governance and personal relationships. By focusing on the micropolitics of the Kaokoveld between 1915 and 1930, it elaborates the point, raised elsewhere by John Lonsdale and Bruce Berman, that interpersonal relationships – not bureaucratic structures – were of crucial importance in the establishment and maintenance of early colonial rule in Africa.⁴

In examining how interpersonal relationships came to be established and maintained after 1915, this article complements the work of Lorena Rizzo and contributes to a better understanding of South African rule in the Kaokoveld between 1915 and 1930.⁵ In the first two decades of South African rule, men such as Oorlog, as Rizzo has argued, ‘benefited from a process through which power and wealth were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a limited number of male potentates, as long as they remained on friendly terms with the colonial state’. Later, following the bureaucratization of South African rule in the Kaokoveld, Oorlog would be prosecuted, in

³ On the establishment and forms of South African rule in Namibia between 1915 and 1945, see P. Hayes, J. Silvester, M. Wallace, and W. Hartmann, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility and Containment, 1915–46* (Oxford, 1998).

⁴ J. Lonsdale and B. Berman, ‘Coping with the contradictions: the development of the colonial state in Kenya, 1895–1914’, *Journal of African History*, 20:4 (1979), 487–505. J. Lonsdale, ‘The conquest state of Kenya’, in J. A. de Moor and H. L. Wesseling (eds.), *Imperialism and War: Essays on Colonial Wars in Asia and Africa* (Leiden, 1989), 87–120; and J. Lonsdale, ‘The politics of conquest: the British in western Kenya, 1894–1908’, *Historical Journal*, 20:4 (1977), 841–70.

⁵ L. Rizzo, ‘Gender and colonialism: a history of Kaoko (north-western Namibia) between the 1870s and 1950s’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Basel, 2009).

effect for embodying a form of colonial administration that had become obsolete.⁶ Yet, in the mid-1910s, Oorlog, through his own manoeuvring, the shrewd stage management of his own image, and the cultivation of interpersonal relations, was essential to the establishment of South African colonial rule in the Kaokoveld.

COLONIAL RULE, CHIEFS, AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

The defeat of German forces in colonial Namibia in 1915 was followed by an attempt to establish South African control over the territory beyond the ‘police zone’, the region, that is, which had never been effectively subjected to German control. Administrators, mostly with various forms of South African military experience, moved into northern Namibia and sought to establish colonial rule between 1915 and 1920.⁷ This direct military administration was transformed into a nominally civilian administration, which, following the establishment of the League of Nations mandate, governed through indirect rule.⁸

Recent scholarship has stressed that indirect rule was a means of reducing administrative costs while concomitantly acquiring local knowledge. According to Frederick Cooper, indirect rule sought to use the ‘legitimacy and coercive capacity of local authority to collect taxes and round up labour’.⁹ J. C. Myers, in turn, argues that indirect rule was a ‘costuming of political power’ that already existed but lacked legitimacy.¹⁰ Both of these perspectives underestimate the extent to which the system and, by extension, the workings of the colonial state, were partly dependent upon the interpersonal relationships that local powerbrokers were able to develop with colonial administrators. In northern Namibia, as Patricia Hayes has written, ‘representatives of the South African colonial state [...] were drawn to the Ovambo embodiments of power: that is, African power – political, religious, social, judicial, economic – concentrated and centralised in the palaces of the polities, embodied in the persons of their kings’. And where they were confronted with ‘societies enjoying more diffused forms of power, such as the decentralised western polity of Ombalantu’, headmen were invented to satisfy the colonial administrators’ demands for a figurehead.¹¹ In both cases, the search for political partners revolved around the promise of a fruitful

⁶ L. Rizzo, ‘The elephant shooting: colonial law and indirect rule in Kaoko, north-western Namibia, in the 1920s and 1930s’, *Journal of African History*, 48:2 (2007), 264 and 266.

⁷ On the haphazard nature of the establishment and maintenance of South African rule in Namibia, see R. Gordon, ‘Vagrancy, law & “shadow knowledge”: internal pacification, 1915–1939’, in Hayes et al., *Namibia*, 51–76.

⁸ T. Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915–1966* (Basel, 1999), 92; J. H. Serfontein, *Namibia?* (Randburg, 1976) 21–2. Many military officers who had entered Namibia in 1915 (Majors Hahn, Manning, and Bowker among them) remained as civilian administrators.

⁹ F. Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley, 2005), 184.

¹⁰ J. C. Myers, *Indirect Rule in South Africa: Tradition, Modernity, and the Costuming of Political Power*, (Rochester, 2008), 14–18 and 25–6.

¹¹ P. Hayes, ‘The “famine of the dams”: gender, labour & politics in colonial Ovamboland, 1929–30’, in Hayes et al., *Namibia*, 123.

interpersonal relationship between African powerbrokers and colonial administrators. Oorlog may not have had the palaces of his Ovambo counterparts, but, within the Kaokoveld, he was able to convince his colonial counterparts that power was centralized in his person.

The manner in which travellers interpreted and dealt with the African landscape and its peoples depended upon their own social background and state of mind at the time of contact. Attention has been drawn to the warped and contradictory manner in which European adventurers saw and dealt with the peoples whom they encountered and environments through which they travelled.¹² Although it is unlikely that Charles Manning was as ‘strung out’ as Johannes Fabian has suggested of some travellers in central Africa, his perception of Oorlog and his relationship with him were coloured by his own socialization and state of mind. Robert Morrell has examined the social history of settlers and settler masculinity in colonial Natal, where Manning was born, socialized, and educated.¹³ In that context, Manning would have been conditioned to recognize strong men as the holders of political authority; and in Oorlog, Manning found just such a man. That is, far from being characterized by the depersonalized activities of the modern bureaucratic state, the appointment of Oorlog was wholly dependent upon the interpersonal relationship that he developed with Manning and his successor. These relationships depended upon shared registers with regard to political authority, and worked well for the early conquest phase of colonial rule in northern Namibia, when the administration was exceptionally thin on the ground, and armed opposition was a very real threat. Twenty years later, when colonial rule was well established, interpersonal relationships would no longer be essential to the functioning of the state and would be ignored with virtual impunity by the colonial administration.

THE KAOKO AND OORLOG’S LIFE

The Kaokoveld is consistently portrayed in popular media as an untouched wilderness whose inhabitants live in isolation.¹⁴ Yet the Himba have always been in contact with the broader world, including the Herero of central Namibia, with whom they are related through language, clans, and matrilineal and patrilineal descent systems. Hunters, traders, and raiders from the Cape

¹² Much has been written on the manner in which Africa and its inhabitants have been viewed and ‘invented’, most notably, V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (London, 1988); K. A. Appiah, *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford, 1992); and J. Fabian, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa* (London, 2000).

¹³ R. Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen: Settler Masculinity in Colonial Natal, 1880–1920* (Pretoria, 2001).

¹⁴ D. Sauter, F. Eisner, P. Ekman, and S. Scott, ‘Cross-cultural recognition of basic emotions through nonverbal emotional vocalizations’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107:6 (2010), 2408–12. Regarding the ‘discovery’ of the Kaokoveld, see C. Wärnlöf, ‘The “discovery” of the Himba: the politics of ethnographic film making’, *Africa*, 70:2 (2000), 175–191. For a rebuttal of the *PNAS* article written by Sauter et al., see J.-B. Gewalt, ‘Remote but in contact with history and the world’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 107:18 (2010), E75.

transformed the societies of central and southern Namibia in the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁵ In the 1860s, they began moving into the Kaokoveld from central Namibia and Angola. Prior to this the Herero-speaking populations of the Kaokoveld ‘the Himba’ had established a society in which pastoralism was the preferred form of economy but hunting and gathering remained important. By the 1880s, the Kaokoveld fell under centralized polities that maintained extensive links with Oorlam settlers established at Sesfontein on the southern reaches of the Kaokoveld.¹⁶ Meanwhile, European traders and Boer trekkers travelled throughout the Kaokoveld. Impoverished by incessant raiding, many Himba migrated out of the Kaokoveld to southern Angola, to seek employment with Boer and Portuguese settlers. Those who remained in the Kaokoveld, according to Michael Bollig, ‘dropped out of pastoralism and adopted a life of foraging in the remote mountainous areas of western Kaokoland’.¹⁷ By the 1890s, the Kaokoveld was largely devoid of pastoralists, with the original inhabitants either enmeshed in the Portuguese colonial economy in southern Angola or living as hunter-gatherers in the inaccessible mountains of the region.

With the establishment of German colonial rule in Namibia and the change from military to civilian rule in Angola, Herero-speaking pastoralists and pastro-foragers began returning to the Kaokoveld. These immigrants, as Rizzo describes, ‘met an impoverished population that had just begun to recover from decades of extended raids in the region and which was slowly building up herds again’.¹⁸ Their process of re-pastoralization was interrupted by the arrival of the Herero chief Muhona Katiti (literally, Chief Small), who had established himself as a commando leader/warlord associated with the Portuguese in southern Angola, and crossed over into the Kaokoveld with his followers in 1910.¹⁹ In the absence of any effective German colonial control and beyond the reach of Portuguese colonial rule, Muhona Katiti established himself as an independent chief in the Kaokoveld. Here his followers engaged in pastoralism, pastro-foraging, hunting for ivory and game products, and gardening where possible at springs and along the Kunene river. It was into this setting that Oorlog would soon arrive.

Oorlog was born in 1863 in Otjimbingwe in central Namibia as the son of Tom Bechuana, a hunter who was associated with Charles John Andersson, and Kaitundu, daughter to a sister of Manasse Tjisisseta, who would later

¹⁵ B. Lau, *Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* (Windhoek, 1987). For Herero specifically, see D. Henrichsen, ‘Herrschaft und Identifikation im vorkolonialen Zentralnamibia: das Herero- und Damaraland im 19. Jh.’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Hamburg, 1998).

¹⁶ Oorlam communities emerged along the north-western Cape colonial frontier in the late eighteenth century, around the institution of the Commando, and consisted of an amalgam of Khoi community remnants, runaway slaves, Basters, Cape outlaws, and others. See J. B. Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890–1923* (Oxford, 1999), 14.

¹⁷ Bollig, ‘Power & trade in precolonial & early colonial northern Kaokoland, 1860s–1940s’, in Hayes et al., *Namibia*, 175–9.

¹⁸ L. Rizzo, ‘A glance into the camera: gendered visions of historical photographs in Kaoko (north-western Namibia)’, *Gender & History*, 17:3 (2005), 702.

¹⁹ Bollig, ‘Power & trade’, 182.

become the chief of Omaruru.²⁰ Oorlog was born in the middle of an attack by Nama forces on the settlement of Otjimbingwe and so his name, appropriately, comes from the Herero word '*vita*', meaning war.²¹

Oorlog's youth was spent in Namibia, where he and his father had close contact with European hunters.²² By the early 1880s, he and his father had moved north and settled among the Boer settlers near Humpata in southern Angola. From at least 1885 onwards, Oorlog became heavily involved with Boer commandos, who, working on behalf of the Portuguese colonial government, sought to gain control of southern Angola. He was directly involved in at least 14 military campaigns in southern Angola and, with the plunder obtained, was able to establish a large following. This group was joined by refugees from the Herero–German war, and by people from as far afield as the southern Kalahari.²³ In 1914, Oorlog and his followers became directly involved in the First World War, and assisted the Portuguese in a successful attack on German forces at Naulila.²⁴ In the following year, Oorlog and his men were part of a force of 9,000 that had been mustered by the Portuguese to attack the Kwanyama in southern Angola.²⁵ During the course of this campaign, in which the Portuguese forces were defeated, Oorlog was wounded.²⁶

In late 1915 or early 1916, Oorlog's long-standing alliance with the Portuguese came to an end. His followers raided cattle from a group of people referred to as the Vale and, after a dispute regarding the distribution of the spoils, Oorlog was declared an outlaw by the Angolan colonial administration, a price was put on his head, and he was threatened with arrest and incarceration in Luanda.²⁷ Hotly pursued by a Boer commando dispatched by the Portuguese authorities, Oorlog and his followers crossed the Kunene river into the Kaokoveld of northern Namibia. Emissaries of the commando followed him and warned him not to attempt to return to Angola.²⁸ From then onwards, Oorlog carved out a niche for himself in the Kaokoveld and, following the visit of Major C. N. Manning, resident

²⁰ Regarding Tom Bechuana, see C. J. Andersson, *Lake Ngami: Or, Exploration and Discoveries During Four Years' Wanderings in the Wilds of South Western Africa* (London, 1856; reprinted Cape Town, 1967). For an overview of the life and times of Manasse Tjisisseta, see J. De Vries, *That Time is Long Gone! Manasse Tjisseta, Chief of Omaruru Namibia 1884–1898* (Cologne, 1999).

²¹ The best biographical overview of Oorlog to date is E. L. P. Stals and A. Otto-Reiner, 'Oorlog en Vrede aan die Kunene: die verhaal van Kaptein Vita Tom 1863–1937', unpublished manuscript (Windhoek, 1990).

²² For biographical details on these hunters, namely Frederick Green, Charles John Andersson, and Axel Wilhelm Ericsson, see E. C. Tabler, *Pioneers of South West Africa and Ngamiland 1738–1880* (Cape Town, 1973).

²³ Regarding the Herero–German war, see Gewalt, *Herero Heroes*, ch. 5.

²⁴ National Archives of Namibia, Windhoek (NAN), Secretary of the Protectorate (ADM) 17, Ovamboland Administration General, Manning Native Affairs Windhoek, 16 Sept. 1915, to Mr Gorges.

²⁵ NAN, South West Africa Administration: Secretariat, A-series (SWAA) 1496, 'Report on the tour of Ovamboland by Major Pritchard, 1915', 21.

²⁶ Stals and Otto-Reiner, 'Oorlog', 29–44.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 44–5.

²⁸ NAN, Officer Commanding Union Troops (OCT) 17, Mr Bull Brodtkorb in Namutoni, 30 March 1917, to Col. de Jager.

commissioner of Ovamboland in 1917, he was installed as chief, a position that he held until his death from cancer in 1937.²⁹ Yet, a few years before his death, the central role that Oorlog had played within the administration of the Kaokoveld began to come to an end. In 1935 he was convicted of perjury and sentenced to jail in Windhoek.³⁰ His conviction heralded a shift in the administration of the Kaokoveld from one reliant on interpersonal relations to a more bureaucratic form of rule.

INITIAL SOUTH AFRICAN VIEWS OF AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS OORLOG

The first impressions that the new South African military administration had of Oorlog were not flattering. If anything, they emphasized his and his followers' violent and predatory nature as they raided and pillaged their way into the Kaokoveld. Yet it was in the face of these reports that the South African authorities later decided to install him as chief with authority over those whom he had raided. Shortly after Oorlog had crossed the Kunene into northern Namibia in September 1916, a policeman stationed in Outjo sent the following rather panicky telegram to the military authorities in Windhoek:

Ovambos Portuguese border marching south have crossed Kunena [Kunene] river. Led by Chief Oorlog. Have shot seven native men one woman south of Kunena. All Natives well armed large number mounted. Have driven all cattle with them and are now close [to] Zesfontein [Sesfontein] kindly instruct.³¹

In response, the authorities in Windhoek demanded more information and ordered the policeman to 'sit tight' and not to 'lose [his] head'.³² Subsequent reports continued to emphasize the aggressive nature of Oorlog and his followers; they came from western Angola, with ample stores and armed with Portuguese Mausers, carried German bandoliers full of ammunition, were mounted, and killed all those who sought to resist them.³³ In response, the military authorities in Windhoek ordered a small patrol, led by Lieutenant Van Wijk, to investigate what was going on.³⁴ Oorlog withdrew to the western Hoarusib where he established his base on the slopes of Ombuku mountain. Indicative of the war footing in which he and his followers found themselves, it was reported that Oorlog 'sleeps on the top of the mountain with his Bodyguard, only coming down to his kraal during the daytime'.³⁵ In addition, Oorlog and his followers had driven off the original inhabitants, creating an effective *cordon sanitaire* around their settlement. Van Wijk reported that all human settlements had been abandoned along a stretch of

²⁹ Stals and Otto-Reiner, 'Oorlog', 82.

³⁰ Rizzo, 'The elephant shooting'.

³¹ NAN, OCT 17, Native Unrest Zesfontein, Telegram, 1 Nov. 1916, from Outjo military police to Windhoek sent at 4:20 pm, arrived 4:31 pm.

³² NAN, OCT 17, WDH to Milpol Outjo, 1 Nov. 1916.

³³ NAN, OCT 17, Telegram, 2 Nov. 1916, from Outjo Milpol to Windhoek.

³⁴ NAN, OCT 17, Copy of telegram from Outjo Milpol to regcom Windhuk. Lt. Van Wijk reports Kaross, 10 Nov. 1916.

³⁵ NAN, OCT 17, 24 Nov. 1916, 'Confidential report on investigation native unrest Kaokoveld'.

17 kilometres. The speed of Oorlog's attack is illustrated by a report from Sergeant Botha, who had been in the area three weeks beforehand and had assured Van Wijk that 'all the kraals were inhabited'.³⁶

Van Wijk's presence did not deter Oorlog and, less than a month after his visit, Oorlog attacked the settlement of Kaoko Otavi, killing 26 people.³⁷ In response, the officer commanding the military detachment in Outjo reported: 'Have discussed matter of native unrest at Gaoko Otavi [...] do not take serious view of matter. Consider it usual tribal disturbance of minor nature. *In any case nothing can be done at present.*'³⁸ Consequently Oorlog continued to develop his position of power, as his followers attacked and drove away all those who were not prepared to submit to his authority.

In February 1917, five months after Oorlog had arrived in the area, reports arrived in Windhoek indicating that his band had attacked a settlement and killed 36 people.³⁹ In response, the authorities began planning a military operation in the area.⁴⁰ The military received extensive information from a Norwegian hunter and trader who had fought with Oorlog in the Boer commandos operating out of Humpata in Angola. H. Bull Brodtkorb's report warned the authorities of Oorlog's military prowess and contained information on his background and that of his followers: 'Oorlog has under him a band of ca. 150 men Hereros, Buschmann and Ovatjibas all well armed and used to war, as they all have been police in Portuguese service, and have run away with their guns and ammunition.'⁴¹ In other contexts and on the flimsiest of evidence, the South Africans had initiated military operations against such perceived threats.

In February 1917, a South African expedition defeated the Ovakwanyama King Mandume, whom the Portuguese and Oorlog and his followers had for so long sought to conquer. The king and his warriors were overrun and, according to oral tradition, Mandume's head was cut off as a trophy.⁴² By defeating and decapitating Mandume, the South Africans suggested that a similar fate awaited anyone else who dared to oppose their rule. Oorlog was informed of Mandume's fate and the new South African administration

³⁶ NAN, OCT 17, *Ibid.*

³⁷ NAN, OCT 17, Telegram, 28 Dec. 1916, Magistrate Outjo to Windhoek.

³⁸ NAN, OCT 17, Telegram from O/C troops in Outjo on 5 Jan. 1917, emphasis added.

³⁹ NAN, OCT 17, Telegram, 27 Feb. 1917, Outjo Milpol to Windhoek.

⁴⁰ In the event, goods and supplies remaining from the attack on the Ovakwanyama King Mandume were to be used. NAN, OCT 17, Telegram Windhoek to Outjo Milpol, 19 March 1917; Staff Officer for Administrative Services, Ovamboland Expedition, Otjiwarongo, 18 March 1917, to Officer Commanding Military Constabulary, Outjo; and Staff Officer for Administrative Services, Ondonga, 7 March 1917, to Transport Officer Ondonga.

⁴¹ NAN, OCT 17, H. Bull Brodtkorb in Namutoni, 30 March 1917, to Col. de Jager, O.C. Troops Windhoek.

⁴² The death of Mandume has been dealt with by a number of historians. For a detailed account based primarily on archival research, see J. Silvester, *My Heart Tells Me That I Have Done Nothing Wrong: The Fall of Mandume* (Windhoek, 1992). For the socio-political context, see P. Hayes, 'A history of the Ovambo of Namibia, ca. 1880–1930', (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), II, 82. For a detailed eyewitness account, see P. Hayes and D. Haiping, '*Healing the Land*': *Kaulinge's History of Kwanyama* (Cologne, 1997), 86–92.

did not mince its words: ‘Mandume’s fate should be an object lesson to all Native Chiefs’. Oorlog was also informed that, ‘he would be allowed to proceed to Windhuk where the administrator will give him a personal interview’.⁴³ Less than three months after the colonial authorities had begun planning a military operation against him, Oorlog accepted their offer and travelled to Windhoek to meet them.⁴⁴

Faced with possible decapitation, Oorlog seized the opportunity of a safe passage to Windhoek and an interview with the South African administrator. In early June 1917 and just four months after Mandume’s death, he arrived in Outjo en route to Windhoek. As a gesture of goodwill, he brought along two Angolan traders whom he had captured as they were seeking to trade and collect debts from him and his followers.⁴⁵ Placated by the gesture and impressed by what he saw, the commanding officer in Outjo considered himself ‘quite satisfied with [Oorlog’s] conduct’.⁴⁶

Oorlog’s subsequent visit to Windhoek and his discussions with the authorities there were a success. Apart from being kitted out by his hosts in an official South African army uniform, he also held extensive talks.⁴⁷ On three separate occasions during these talks, Colonel de Jager, the commanding officer of the South African forces in Namibia and the man who had personally led the attack against Mandume, brought up the fate of Mandume and his role in the king’s demise: ‘the Government sent me to fetch Mandume and we fought with him [...] Where is Mandume today? He is finished!’⁴⁸ At the conclusion of the discussions it was decided that an army patrol would travel to the Kaokoveld. Colonel de Jager formally addressed Oorlog in the third person and stated:

What I want from Oorlog is that when the patrol comes to him he must show it the roads and where the water is to be found and so on. The officer who goes with it will be the mouth of the Government and will come back and tell me everything. [...] The Government has now met Oorlog and looks to him.⁴⁹

In case Oorlog had not understood the string of threats implied in his accounts of the demise of Mandume, de Jager stated bluntly: ‘If any one of the patrol is injured – if so much as a hair on his head is touched by any one of you then I will come with troops and descend on you like the rain.’⁵⁰ The man selected by Colonel de Jager to tour the Kaokoveld was Major

⁴³ NAN, OCT 17, Office of the Officer Commanding Union Forces in Windhoek, 24 April 1917, to the Officer Commanding, Military Constabulary, Outjo.

⁴⁴ NAN, OCT 17, Milpol Outjo, 1 June 1917, to Windhoek.

⁴⁵ Having arrested these men and handed them over to the South African authorities, Oorlog probably ensured that his debts to these traders no longer needed to be paid. NAN, OCT 17, ‘Notes of an interview between Colonel de Jager, Major J. F. Herbst, and Lieut Beckley M. Constabulary, with the Native Headman Oorlog, his younger brother and one of Oorlog’s sons, at the office of the Officer Commanding Troops, Government Buildings, at Windhuk, on Wednesday, the 6th of June, 1917, at 10.30 a.m.’, fo. 7.

⁴⁶ NAN, OCT 17, Milpol Outjo, 1 June 1917, to Windhoek.

⁴⁷ NAN, OCT 17, ‘Notes of an interview’, fo. 7; Union Defence Force, Issue Voucher for Clothing, No. 362, 11 June 1917.

⁴⁸ NAN, OCT 17, ‘Notes of an interview’, fo. 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* fo. 6.

C. N. Manning, who, as resident commissioner of Ovamboland, had called in the military expedition that had defeated and decapitated King Mandume.

ESCORTING MANNING INTO THE KAOKOVELD

Lawrence Green, the author of numerous popular history and travel books on southern Africa between the 1930s and 1970s, referred to Manning in vigorous terms as ‘a man among men’, a ‘short, slightly built adventurer’ with ‘an extremely virile body – correct, precise and proper to the last button’.⁵¹ Quoting an informant (probably Major ‘Cocky’ Hahn, who succeeded Manning as resident commissioner of Ovamboland), Green noted that an outstanding trait of Manning’s was that ‘He knew natives. He had that understanding mind, that sympathy and patience, which are the essentials for the job. I considered him to be one of the best native administrators I had ever met.’⁵² A few years after the patrol with Oorlog into the Kaoko, Manning applied for membership of the Royal Geographical Society in London and in his letter provided some biographical details and described his exploits in northern Namibia.⁵³ Born in Natal, South Africa and educated at Maritzburg College, Manning served in the South African War from 1899 to 1902, ending up as an officer commanding Zulu police in Pretoria.⁵⁴ He was then transferred to native affairs and became a native commissioner in the Transvaal. As chief clerk to the native commissioner in Pretoria he acquired the nickname *Fakasimbi* (literally, ‘put on steel’), which referred to his penchant for placing people in handcuffs. At the outbreak of the First World War, Manning enlisted again and served as an intelligence officer during the Boer rebellion in South Africa, before taking part in the invasion of German South West Africa as a scouting officer.⁵⁵ Following the defeat of the German forces, Manning was sent to northern Namibia with a small party of political officers to take control as resident commissioner of Ovamboland, a posting that culminated in the death of King Mandume.⁵⁶

Oorlog’s conduct following his visit to Windhoek suggests how he put to use the knowledge he had acquired there. Instead of travelling directly to his newly established base at Kaoko Otavi in the middle of the Kaokoveld, he broke his journey in Sesfontein on its southern boundary to await the arrival of Manning’s patrol. When Manning and his party finally arrived in Sesfontein, Oorlog claimed that he had been unable to proceed on account of the activities of Muhona Katiti, the Ovahimba chief who had been the most powerful chief in the Kaoko prior to Oorlog’s invasion. Oorlog claimed that

⁵¹ L. G. Green, *Lords of the Last Frontier: The Story of South West Africa and its People of All Races* (Cape Town, 1952), 75.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ NAN, Accessions (A) 450, vol. 4, Cocky Hahn’s private papers, copy of letter written by Manning to the Royal Geographical Society, 19 Dec. 1921.

⁵⁴ Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen*, explicitly deals with Maritzburg College as an important site for the socialization of boys and men in settler Natal.

⁵⁵ At the outbreak of the First World War, large numbers of Boer soldiers and their officers refused to take up arms against imperial Germany and many entered into open rebellion against imperial Britain. See T. R. H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History* (2nd edn, Johannesburg, 1978), 184–6.

⁵⁶ *Dictionary of South African Biography* (Cape Town, 1968–87), V, 488.

Muhona Katiti had been occupying the passes that led into the Kaoko and that, anxious to avoid any clashes, he had decided to remain in Sesfontein to await the arrival of Manning's patrol. Manning never bothered to check whether or not Oorlog's account was true. Instead, in the nine days that the patrol rested in Sesfontein, Manning came to rely increasingly on Oorlog, who found men to assist the South Africans in their reconstruction of the dilapidated former German garrison. By assisting Manning, Oorlog displayed his willingness to cooperate with the new administration and, perhaps more importantly, indicated to one and all in the Kaoko that he was now allied to the South Africans.⁵⁷

The provision of South African uniforms to Oorlog and his lieutenants served to underscore their alliance with the South African military; clothed in the same uniform, they stood with the new power in the Kaokoveld. In part, it was the ephemeral quality of being 'civilized', as opposed to being 'savage', that served to ensure South African support. In a later report, South African officials described the difference between Oorlog's followers and other inhabitants of the Kaokoveld:

They appear to have the speech and customs of the Herrero [*sic*] within the Police Zone, at some places far enough advanced as to affect the styles of dress peculiar to the Herrero [*sic*] living in civilization, in other cases they are in the natural state.⁵⁸

This quote explicitly mentions South African concerns with clothing as an indicator of civilization and demonstrates that they had but little historical insight into what was going on in the Kaokoveld. Though the reports of Manning and others did refer to the past, it is clear that they did not realize that a large number of the Herero whom they encountered in the Kaokoveld were originally from the police zone. These people, in contrast to the Himba – who, as Oorlog described to officials, 'wear long hair and brass bands on their wrists' – would have been more familiar and acceptable to the incoming South African administration.⁵⁹

Following the Herero–German war, Oorlog welcomed and sheltered a number of highly skilled Herero who had fled the carnage in central Namibia. Their skills ranged from gunsmithing to preaching and writing. To incoming visitors from the police zone, such as Manning and his patrol, Oorlog would have seemed to be surrounded by people who were 'familiar' to them. Moreover, Oorlog's followers affected aspects of colonial culture that had developed in the frontier societies frequented by the Boers.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ NAN, ADM 156, General Kaokoland report Major Manning, 7.

⁵⁸ NAN, SWAA 23, McHugh, 22 July 1926, to Secretary SWA Windhoek.

⁵⁹ NAN, OCT 17, 'Notes of an interview', fo. 2.

⁶⁰ See in this regard the development of similar traditions among the Griqua and Oorlam communities in southern and central Namibia and South Africa, as described in Lau, *Namibia*. On South Africa proper, see M. C. Legassick, 'The Northern Frontier to 1820: the emergence of the Griqua people', in R. Elphick and H. Gilliomee (eds.), *The Shaping of South African Society, 1652–1820* (Cape Town, 1979); N. Penn, *Rogues, Rebels and Runaways: Eighteenth-century Cape Characters* (Cape Town, 1999); N. Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier: Colonist and Khoisan on the Cape's Northern Frontier in the 18th Century* (Cape Town, 2005); R. Ross, *Adam Kok's Griquas: A Study in the Development of Stratification in South Africa* (Cambridge, 1976).

Not only did a number of them speak a form of Afrikaans, they also had *agterryers*, servants who helped guard and provision camps, as was the case with Boer commandos.⁶¹ This indicates the deeply stratified society that had developed around Oorlog and his followers, a stratification that would have been immediately familiar to Manning and his fellow colonials. In the rugged and radically different wilderness landscape that was the Kaokoveld, these were people to whom incoming colonial officials could relate.

BACKING TOM AND VILIFYING MUHONA KATITI

In reading Manning's 1917 report, we find that one aspect comes to the fore: Manning's vilification of Muhona Katiti. When referring to his expedition, Manning noted that he had sought to ensure the settlement of a hostile dispute between an 'Ovathimba headman Muhona Katiti' and 'a more civilized half blood Herero headman, Oorlog, who had gone to Windhuk to personally repudiate charges'.⁶² In this, Manning neatly summed up what he believed was the case in the Kaoko: Oorlog was the 'civilized native', in contrast to the 'savage' Muhona Katiti. Manning had formed a positive opinion of Oorlog when he had first met him in Windhoek in June 1917 and carried this positive image into the Kaoko. Everything he saw merely served to reinforce his initial impressions, and in his reports he consistently compared and contrasted Oorlog with Muhona Katiti.

In the opening paragraphs of his report 'Oorlog and Muhona Katiti: history of and dispute between these chieftains', Manning did not disguise his awe of Oorlog.⁶³ In the tired cliché used by colonial officials the world over, he bestowed high praise on Oorlog, calling him 'a highly intelligent native'. Apart from the subjective characterization of Oorlog as a man of good presence and personality, Manning indicated that Oorlog was associated with the hunters Green, Andersson, Ericsson, and Hahn, men who would become the heroes of white Namibian history.⁶⁴ In so doing, he emphasized that Oorlog was to be counted not as an émigré from southern Angola but as a person with a long history of association with and in Namibia.

Neatly dressed in his new South African army uniform, Oorlog had a lot going for him, partly because he was blessed with such an unusual, if somewhat dramatic, name that resonated power. It was a name that appealed to the incoming South African administrators as one that was redolent with the schoolboy fantasies and ideas so familiar to the young administrators, most of whom had been educated in the *Boys' Own* world of boarding schools

⁶¹ NAN, SWAA 23, A3/69, Special Police Patrol into Kaokoveld 1925–1926, Sergeant, South West Police, Karibib, 22 July 1926, to Secretary SWA Windhoek. For more on *agterryers* ('those who ride behind'), see P. Warwick, *Black People and the South African War, 1899–1902* (Johannesburg, 1983), 11, 25, 26, 130.

⁶² NAN, ADM 156, Manning Report, 1.

⁶³ NAN, ADM 106, Extract from General Report of Manning, 1917. Without access to something like Manning's personal diaries, there is, of course, no way of knowing whether Manning was telling his superiors what he believed or what he wanted his superiors to believe.

⁶⁴ Tabler, *Pioneers*.

in the Cape and Natal.⁶⁵ Manning's first report on Oorlog emphasized the meaning of Oorlog's name as war, and Hahn also never tired of translating it.⁶⁶ For the administrators, Oorlog's name reminded them not merely of the Herero–Nama wars of the 1860s (and thus of Oorlog's legitimate right to settlement in Namibia), but also of the use to which he and his followers had been put by the Portuguese in Angola, where he had demonstrated, no fewer than 14 times, his prowess in war and his willingness and ability to work hand in hand with a colonial administration.⁶⁷ This was further proof that Oorlog was willing to assist the colonial state in its conquest.

By the time Manning and Oorlog moved out of Sesfontein, Manning was no longer detached from the conflict that he was meant to solve. Describing their joint departure from Sesfontein, Manning noted that he had sent messages to Muhona Katiti and was 'taking proper precautions against any surprise attack by these wild nomadic people [Muhona Katiti's followers] who were known to be well armed with rifles besides their own weapons'.⁶⁸ Manning's description of Muhona Katiti's followers as 'wild nomadic people' against whom it was necessary to take precautions was immediately contrasted with 'the presence of Oorlog's well disciplined party which had been considerably augmented by wandering Ovatsimba people joining him from the mountains'.⁶⁹ Muhona Katiti was presented as being all that Oorlog was not. In contrast to Oorlog – well dressed, riding a horse, and leading a band of well-disciplined followers – Muhona Katiti is first described as emerging 'from his adjacent kraal of grass and cow dung huts'.⁷⁰ Manning's opening paragraph on Muhona Katiti, reads as follows:

An Ovatschimba, contemptuous term originally applied only to poorer type of Kaoko Hereros, obtaining precarious living in mountains without stock or any fixed abodes. This man about 65 years old and like his people looks a real savage in sundry metal ornaments, grease, skin girdle, wool or hair bunched and bound with fine leather behind head.⁷¹

In emphasizing the contrast between Oorlog and Katiti, and thus justifying his decision to support Oorlog in his conflict with Katiti, Manning continued to stress what he considered to be the drawbacks of Muhona and his followers. In particular, he suggested that they had no understanding as to what colonial administration entailed: 'Owing to the suspicious nature of these people, their total ignorance of real administration and friction between parties great care had to be taken to avoid excitement and probable conflict'.⁷²

⁶⁵ For more on this topic, see, e.g., Morrell, *From Boys to Gentlemen*; J. Richards, "'Boys' Own Empire": feature films and imperialism in the 1930s', in J. M. Mackenzie (ed.), *'Boys' Own Empire': Imperialism and Popular Culture* (Manchester, 1986).

⁶⁶ NAN, ADM 106, Manning Extract, 1.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* 5.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.* 2.

⁷² *Ibid.* 6.

The contrast presented by Manning could not have been greater: the regal leader, Oorlog, and the savage, Muhona Katiti. Having created this dichotomy, Manning then proceeded to emphasize Muhona's subservience to Oorlog by citing evidence from 'Oorlog's statement'.⁷³

The fact that Oorlog and his followers engaged in agriculture was another aspect brought to the fore by Manning to illustrate Oorlog's suitability for office. The perceived superiority of agricultural and mixed economies to pastoral ones is well known.⁷⁴ As men of their time, these sentiments were shared by Manning and other colonial officials, and Oorlog was aware of the moral value that was attached to being involved in agriculture.⁷⁵ During his meeting in Windhoek, when seeking to differentiate his followers from the original inhabitants of the Kaokoveld, Oorlog commented, 'we sow mealies and Kaffircorn. The Otjimbis do not sow. We have Mhango, tobacco and calabashes also.'⁷⁶

Manning's moral judgment regarding agriculture, and the distinction between Oorlog and Muhona Katiti, is illustrated by his report of passing, 'several old cattle posts of Muhona Katiti's wandering Ovatshimba [...] in this fertile valley, though no attempts at agriculture anywhere'.⁷⁷ Manning did not merely present the image of a fertile valley lying fallow but also attached to this an explicit moral judgement. The fertile valley lay fallow precisely because 'Muhona Katiti's wandering Ovatshimba' made no attempt at agriculture. The failure of Muhona Katiti's followers to work the land was juxtaposed with the activities of the followers of Oorlog: 'Oorlog's settlement [...] several parts good for agriculture and being developed by Oorlog's people but general rocky and sandy condition country detracts.'⁷⁸ To Manning it was clear that, even in the most difficult and adverse of conditions, Oorlog and his followers had engaged in agriculture and were thus the more civilized.

Manning's reports cited Muhona Katiti's conflicts with Europeans and contrasted this with Oorlog's close cooperation with Europeans and colonial administrations. Not only had Oorlog assisted the Portuguese authorities against African opponents (most notably the Kwanyama), but he and his soldiers had participated in the war against imperial Germany. In the eyes of Manning and others at the time, Oorlog was considered a natural ally of the new South African administration, which had also fought against the

⁷³ *Ibid.* 2.

⁷⁴ For an introduction to the literature, see J. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven, 1998).

⁷⁵ It is interesting to speculate, given that Oorlog was born and spent his youth in Otjimbingwe, that he imbibed these sentiments from the Rhenish missionaries stationed in the settlement. These missionaries, who had first established themselves in Otjimbingwe in the 1850s, continually attempted to turn the migrant pastoralists who roamed the vicinity into settled agriculturalists. To this end, the missionaries doggedly attempted to sow and reap crops of wheat in the Swakop riverbed that ran through the settlement. For a detailed overview of these attempts, see Archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, Windhoek, V. Chroniken 25. Otjimbingwe.

⁷⁶ NAN, OCT 17, 'Notes of an interview', 3.

⁷⁷ NAN, ADM 156, Manning Report, 11.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 14.

Kwanyama and the Germans.⁷⁹ Manning particularly emphasized that the Portuguese had made extensive use of Oorlog's prowess to 'assist them against rebellious tribes e.g. the Humbe, Omrondo, Evare, Okavango Ovambos and finally against Ovakuanyama Chief Mandume'.⁸⁰ In contrast to Oorlog, who was presented as having cooperated with 'Europeans' and as having come to Namibia on account of the installation of an English administration in the territory, Muhona Katiti was consistently portrayed as being at odds with Europeans.⁸¹ On account of Manning's depictions of Muhona Katiti as the foil to Oorlog, future colonial administrators who had to deal with the Kaoko continued to portray Oorlog as the 'civilized native' on the path to enlightenment, and Muhona Katiti as the 'savage'. By 1926, Muhona Katiti had ceased to be a person and was portrayed by colonial administrators as a mere caricature. Thus, in referring to Muhona Katiti in passing, Hahn noted that Oorlog 'having come into contact with civilization much more than Mahona [...] is more experienced and much more resourceful than his slow thinking neighbour and in dealings usually has the upper hand over his resentful rival'.⁸²

In 1917, as Manning and Oorlog proceeded into the Kaokoveld, Oorlog's symbolic power came to be supplemented by more tangible forms. Manning's patrol, which was accompanied by Oorlog's commando, travelled through the southern reaches of the Kaokoveld and confiscated rifles and arms from all those who were not allied to Oorlog. On arriving at Muhona Katiti's kraal, the patrol confiscated 25 rifles and later, after Manning and Oorlog had moved on, South African patrols confiscated a further 70 rifles or so, 'principally from Muhona Katiti's wild roving natives'.⁸³

Apart from confiscating rifles and thereby substantially weakening Muhona Katiti's physical powers of coercion, Manning consciously sought to humiliate Muhona Katiti in the eyes of the inhabitants of the Kaokoveld. Manning held a hearing in late August 1917 at Muhona Katiti's kraal in which:

Under cross examination Muhona Katiti admitted Oorlog had always behaved justly and that accusations had been recklessly made. In view of trouble and expenditure caused to our Government I gave as my opinion and Lieut. Olivier concurred, that a fine in stock should be paid. Muhona who expressed regret delivered about 37 cattle and 25 sheep. As only a few more rifles were produced and it was suspected that a number were still outstanding we decided to confiscate all and gave Muhona Katiti our reasons. He offered little or no objections saying he only wanted a peaceful life under Government and would look to Oorlog as his superior and friend [...]⁸⁴

⁷⁹ NAN, ADM 106, Manning Extract, 3.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 1.

⁸¹ The presentation of Oorlog's relations to colonial administration in southern Angola shortly before his move to Namibia contrasts sharply with the view presented by Mr. Brodtkorb. NAN, OCT 17, H. Bull Brodtkorb in Namutoni, 30 March 17, to Col. de Jager, O.C. Troops Windhoek.

⁸² NAN, SWAA 23, Officer in Charge, Native Affairs, Ondonga, 20 May 1926, Cocky Hahn to Secretary for SWA Windhoek, 3.

⁸³ NAN, ADM 106, Manning Extract, 6; and ADM 156, Manning Report, 43.

⁸⁴ NAN, ADM 106, Manning Extract 7.

Muhona Katiti was also ordered to hand in further rifles to the authorities, move his settlement closer to Oorlog's, 'and to listen to advice of Oorlog whom we provisionally set up as Foreman subject to Government's approval'.⁸⁵ By the time Manning left the Kaokoveld, Muhona Katiti and his followers had been reduced to a position where they were subject to the mercy of Oorlog. In the frank words of Manning, Muhona Katiti and his followers 'were scarcely armed at all and quite content to plant fields and remain quietly under direction of Oorlog'.⁸⁶ Manning's patrol, with its confiscation of Muhona Katiti's rifles and the enforced submission of Muhona Katiti to Oorlog, had thoroughly undermined Muhona Katiti's power.

SOUTH AFRICAN ADMINISTRATION AND IDEAL TYPES

In order to govern the Kaokoveld and its inhabitants, Manning and his associates created ideal types in their minds that they then sought to enforce on the ground. Or, as one of them put it:

The natives in the country patrolled appear to fall into two main social groups, each of which are again in two subdivisions and it is necessary to make these divisions clear in order that the actual position may be understood.⁸⁷

The racial thinking of the time ranked white above black, but also sought to define ethnic hierarchies of political and social development within the African population.⁸⁸ With these racial ideas in mind, South African administrators governed the Kaokoveld and justified their actions vis-à-vis its inhabitants.

Administrators did not merely create ideal types when dealing with the population of the Kaokoveld but also sought to shift people and stock in such a way as to create administrative areas that corresponded with the models they had created in their heads.⁸⁹ In 1917, Manning decided that the best way to ensure the correct enforcement of South African administration in the Kaokoveld would be through the creation of a 'broad uninhabited region between Kaoko and Ovambo'.⁹⁰ Manning recommended that the presence of a man of Oorlog's character and influence would have a 'very beneficial effect in preservation of order and [would] be very useful for Administrative purposes in that distant locality'.⁹¹ On these grounds, he 'respectfully suggested that a reserve be provided for [Oorlog]' and that 'he be recognised as government headman over Northern

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ NAN, ADM 106, Manning extract 8.

⁸⁷ NAN, SWAA 23, McHugh, 22 July 1926, to Secretary SWA Windhoek.

⁸⁸ Saul Dubow, *Scientific Racism in Modern South Africa* (Cambridge, 1995).

⁸⁹ For a comparative and eloquently written case see, S. F. Moore, *Social Facts and Fabrications: 'Customary' Law on Kilimanjaro, 1880-1980* (Cambridge, 1986). Rather less eloquently, J.-B. Gewald, 'Making tribes: social engineering in the Western Province of British administered Eritrea 1941-52', *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History*, 1: 2 (2000), http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/journal_of_colonialism_and_colonial_history/v001/1.2gewald.html (consulted 9 February 2011).

⁹⁰ NAN, ADM 156, Manning Report, 73.

⁹¹ *Ibid.* 35.

Kaokoveld'.⁹² Manning's words sum up the features required by the incoming South African administration and which he had found in Oorlog.⁹³

Given Oorlog's military prowess, it is hardly surprising that the inhabitants of the Kaokoveld treated him with consideration, tact, and deference. For Manning, these qualities, borne more out of fear than reverence, were perceived as examples of respect for Oorlog's leadership qualities,⁹⁴ a respect that further served to emphasize to the incoming administrators that Oorlog was the ideal person to be appointed as chief and the government's representative in the Kaokoveld.

COUNTER VIEWS

To all intents and purposes, South African administrators situated Oorlog as the ideal person for the position but, on occasion, some voiced different views. In early 1926, Sergeant McHugh, who led the second major South African expedition into the Kaokoveld, accused Oorlog of a number of misdemeanours and crimes and provided detailed information on how Oorlog had been engaged in smuggling goods and stock to and from Ovamboland, harbouring fugitives from justice, smuggling ivory into Angola, forms of slavery, gunrunning with the Ovambo chiefs Ipumbu and Martin, and the illicit hunting of game.⁹⁵ In addition, McHugh indicated that the tense relationship between Muhona Katiti and Oorlog still existed and posed a threat to peace and stability in the region. In a four-page diatribe, Hahn, as officer in charge of native affairs in Ovamboland, sought to dismiss these accusations as irrelevant.⁹⁶

Hahn's aggressive rebuttal of McHugh's report is understandable in light of the role that the incoming South African administration had assigned to Oorlog. On the basis of Manning's findings, Oorlog had been given a pivotal role in the colonial administration of the Kaokoveld at the expense of Muhona Katiti. In effect, as a chief in league with the colonial administration, he was a creation of Manning's and was maintained by Hahn. In addition, through supporting Oorlog, Manning and Hahn had attached their own reputations to his success. It was the status quo, with Oorlog as the chief of the Kaokoveld, that was essential to Hahn's own position as a 'Lord of the Last Frontier'.⁹⁷ It was a status quo, which Hahn anxiously sought to

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ Oorlog features in Green's *Lords of the Last Frontier*, 75–81, in an extensive description that is based on Manning's 1917 tour report.

⁹⁴ NAN, ADM 106, Manning Extract, 7.

⁹⁵ NAN, SWAA 23, Report Kaokoveld Patrol, 1925.

⁹⁶ NAN, SWAA 23, Hahn in Ondonga, 20 May 1926, to Secretary for South West Africa.

⁹⁷ Carl Hugo Linsingen Hahn (1886–1948), grandson of Carl Hugo Hahn, the German missionary who effectively established the Rhenish Mission in central Namibia in the nineteenth century. The young Hahn, known as 'Cocky' by his friends and colleagues, and *Shangolo* ('Whip') by his subjects, dominated the administration of Ovamboland for three decades. In 1910 he played for the Springboks, the South African rugby team. In Namibia, he became particularly known as an administrator, amateur ethnographer, and photographer. See Gregor Dobler, 'Traders and trade in colonial Ovamboland, 1925–1990: elite formation and the politics of consumption under indirect rule and apartheid' (unpublished *Habilitationschrift*, University of Basel, 2010), 47–9.

preserve, even if this was in the face of contrary evidence provided by other colonial officials, such as McHugh.

Given the above, the charges levelled by McHugh could not be accepted by Hahn, if only because Oorlog was the linchpin in the *männerphantasie* created by Manning and maintained by Hahn.⁹⁸ In effect, Oorlog had been installed with absolute powers. A clear example of this is that Oorlog even had a licence to kill at will. In 1917, as some people tried to cross into southern Angola:

Oorlog had sent some men to prohibit this unauthorised emigration and to order them to come to him and Muhona Katiti, upon which this section of people had opened fire with a few odd rifles on [*sic*] and wounding one of Oorlog's messengers who in defending themselves had killed three of this lot who eventually got away with some stock into Angola via Swartboo's drift.⁹⁹

In this instance, Manning saw no reason to rebuke Oorlog for the killings and instead he and his men were praised for having assisted the colonial administration.

With the tacit support of the colonial administration, Oorlog could, in effect, do very much as he pleased. This is illustrated by an incident that took place shortly before McHugh's visit to the Kaoko in 1925. In 1917, cattle had been taken from Oorlog and presented to Muhona Katiti in a settlement deal brokered by Lieutenant Olivier. Six years later, a commando led by Oorlog attacked Muhona Katiti's settlement and recaptured these cattle.¹⁰⁰ Though Muhona Katiti tried to report the attack, the correspondence related to the case indicates that his complaints were not taken seriously. Hahn, as native administrator, dismissed Muhona Katiti's claim, noting that: 'Mahona-kititi [...] would only be too keen to report happenings in Oorlog's country or adjoining areas, since he regards the latter, not exactly as an enemy, but with extreme suspicion and jealousy.'¹⁰¹ Hahn's words indicate that Oorlog, as the man who fit the ideal created by the administrators, was to receive a favourable hearing from the self-same administrators, whereas Muhona Katiti was consistently denied a fair hearing. His position, as Hahn saw it, was little more than that of an informer.

In contrast to Hahn, McHugh maintained a different opinion of Muhona Katiti. When reporting on his relationship with the chief, McHugh wrote that Muhona Katiti 'was very friendly, during the whole period the patrol remained in his country, it is believed that he will assist the Police in every way, he was rather disappointed to learn that more police were not coming up'.¹⁰² The permanent presence of police was something that Muhona Katiti would have appreciated, if only because it meant that they could keep a check on Oorlog. In later years, as McHugh's report suggests, Muhona Katiti and

⁹⁸ I refer here to the work by Klaus Theweleit on fascist consciousness and bodily experience: K. Theweleit, *Male Fantasies, Vol I and Vol II*, trans. E. Carter and C. Turner (Minneapolis, 1989).

⁹⁹ NAN, ADM 106, Manning Extract, 8–9.

¹⁰⁰ NAN, SWAA 23, Report Kaokoveld Patrol, 1925, 15.

¹⁰¹ NAN, SWAA 23, Officer in Charge, Native Affairs, Ondonga, 20 May 1926, Cocky Hahn to Secretary for SWA Windhoek, 2.

¹⁰² NAN, SWAA 23, Report Kaokoveld Patrol, 1925, 16.

his followers saw the South African administration officials as a third force operating independently of, and in time at variance with, Oorlog.

It could be argued that, when Manning moved into the Kaokoveld with Oorlog in 1917, many of the Kaokoveld inhabitants saw Oorlog, not Manning, as the expedition's leader. In 1917, Oorlog was effectively the ruler by conquest of the Kaokoveld and, as Brodtkorb's words of warning suggested, Manning was only able to operate in the Kaokoveld in cooperation with him.¹⁰³ For the people of the Kaokoveld, Oorlog had moved into their territory from southern Angola where he had built up a fearsome reputation as a warlord. After coming into conflict with Muhona Katiti, Oorlog travelled to Windhoek and returned accompanied by a heavily armed patrol of South African soldiers, dressed in uniforms that were indistinguishable from the new uniforms being worn by Oorlog and his lieutenants. After this, Oorlog proceeded to move through the Kaokoveld disarming all his opponents.

In their dealings with Manning, Oorlog and his followers sought to deploy a language of comradeship that evoked manly camaraderie and parity. In accordance with Afrikaner trek Boer tradition, in which men of the same age refer to one another as 'Boet' (derived from the Dutch word *Broeder* meaning brother), male members of Oorlog's following referred to one another as 'Boetie'. In his 1917 expedition report, Manning noted with pleasure that a headman named Weripaka 'already addresses [Oorlog] as "Boetie" [a] customary term employed amongst [the] latter's followers'.¹⁰⁴ To help Manning better understand the Kaokoveld, Oorlog assigned a number of men to accompany Manning's patrol who, when speaking to him, also addressed him as 'Boetie'.¹⁰⁵

CONCLUSION

Michael Crowder, writing about West Africa, commented on the problems that faced 'colonial conquistadors' attempting to establish administrations in the territories they claimed. 'In the first place', he noted, 'they were largely ignorant of the nature of the societies they were about to govern'. In addition, 'the administrations imposed [...] were necessarily *ad hoc* and greatly influenced by the personality of the man imposing them'.¹⁰⁶ Crowder's words are equally apt for the Kaokoveld, where the personalities not only of the 'colonial conquistadors' – Manning and Hahn – but also of the 'conquered' – Oorlog – were of crucial importance.

In the case of the Kaoko, the bulk of the information available to Manning and Hahn came from Oorlog. The 'colonial conquistadors', although they sought to portray another image of themselves in their formal

¹⁰³ Brodtkorb was the Norwegian trader and hunter who had fought in joint commandos with Oorlog in southern Angola, and who had provided the incoming South Africans with their first detailed reports on Oorlog. Brodtkorb urged the South African military to negotiate and warned that 'If Oorlog sees a big force coming up, he will probably fight and will have good chances in the mountains and passes'. NAN, OCT 17, H. Bull Brodtkorb in Namutoni, 30 March 17, to Col. de Jager, O.C. Troops Windhoek.

¹⁰⁴ NAN, ADM 156, Manning Report, 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 25.

¹⁰⁶ M. Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (London, 1968), 165.

correspondence, were dependent on him. Having elevated Oorlog to a position of power, it was imperative for Manning and Hahn to support him both in the interests of the conquest state and also in the interests of their own careers within the colonial administration. That is, though Oorlog's failings were probably apparent to Manning and Hahn, as part of efforts to aid their own careers and reputations as well as the success of the conquest, those failings could be overlooked.

Oorlog's willingness to cooperate with the South African administration, even though it was clear that he was responsible for the death of numerous opponents, did not harm his standing with Manning and Hahn, and by extension the colonial administration. If anything, his willingness to intervene actively and exercise his power appealed to the conquest state. Yet, a few years later, as Rizzo's work has detailed, the interests of the South African administration had shifted away from rule based on these interpersonal relations, and the disappearance of a single witness could be used to remove Oorlog from power.¹⁰⁷

Central to Oorlog's colonial success in the Kaoko was his ability to mould and influence the interpersonal relationships that he developed with representatives of the South African colonial administration. The importance of these relationships in the establishment and maintenance of colonial rule in Africa is generally overlooked in favour of broad brushstroke history that subsumes the importance of individuals to structural processes.¹⁰⁸ The significance of the relationships that Oorlog developed with Manning and later Hahn, based on mutual admiration and shared visions of masculine power, should not be underestimated. Although these personal relations and notions of masculinity may not have defined the structures of the conquest state, they did determine who would be chief. Thus, at the furthest reaches of South African rule, the interpersonal was paramount.

¹⁰⁷ As Rizzo aptly noted, 'the administration tended to support the headmen's exercise of power and application of controlled violence against their subjects, as long as it remained useful to the general colonial project' (Rizzo, 'The elephant shooting', 260).

¹⁰⁸ For a comparative approach that recognizes the importance of the individual, see Baz Lecocq, *That Desert is Our Country': Tuareg Rebellions and Competing Nationalisms in Contemporary Mali (1946–1996)* (Amsterdam, 2002), 28–9.