

**The Impact of Migrant Labour Infrastructure on Contract  
Workers in and from Colonial Ovamboland, Namibia,  
1915 to 1954**

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Dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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WESTERN CAPE

Supervisor: Professor Patricia Hayes

## DECLARATION

I declare that *The Impact of Migrant Labour Infrastructure on Contract Workers in and from Colonial Ovamboland, Namibia, 1915 to 1954*, is my work, and I have not submitted it for any degree or examination in any other University. I acknowledge all sources that I used or quoted by completing references.

Full Name: Lovisa Tegelela Nampala

Date: December 2020

Signed .....

*L. Nampala*



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In 1983 when I was 10 years old, the Onambango Royal Court in the Ondonga Kingdom summoned my parents to inform them that I should join the palace (*ombala*) to go babysit a princess (*ndi ka lele omukombanda*) Mutika ya Andreas Josef Sheya. After two years of my stay in the *ombala*, I learnt that there were several motives employed to bring as many people to the palace as possible. I also came to learn about who performed what chores and why, how one survived as regards eating and so forth. The cited experience is what I yearned to pick up and write about as my doctoral studies topic in 2015, but that did not materialize owing to lack of literature on that subject.

During the journey in search of my Doctor of Philosophy topic,<sup>1</sup> I engaged many readings on the Namibian contract labour system, and I learnt that a number of researchers wrote about it from a negative perspective. Their findings fascinated me enough to want to seek a more optimistic interpretation about the subject. Surprisingly, this study objective, which inquiries into how contract labour dealt with workers' mortality and its impact on workers and families back in the sending areas, made me end up investigating the death of my uncle Andreas Pinehas who died fifty-three years ago on contract, and how his passing away affected his colleagues as well as his family.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding acknowledgements, I am very grateful to the Carl Schlettwein Foundation for granting me a scholarship, which for almost three years enabled me to conduct numerous in-depth interviews with previous contract labourers and related persons from the former seven Aawambo kingdoms. I also thank Uukelo CS School Board of 2014, and in particular, the

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<sup>1</sup> It is mandatory that one comes with a subject of research.

<sup>2</sup> When I was young, Aina Pinehas (my mother) used to tell us (her children) about her younger brother who had drowned and died in *ondamulo* (the term for an empty storage room where consignments were loaded and offloaded by South Africa Railways & Harbours workers in Walvis Bay) on contract labour. I had so many questions about her brother's death, which she could not answer owing to limited information she had on the matter. During my fieldwork, I eventually found clarity on the issue, as presented to me by a retired contract labourer in the former Uukwaluudhi kingdom.

School Management Haipinge Erastus Kapwati and Petrina Shafewa, for allowing me in 2015 and 2017 to attend university full time.

My whole-hearted gratitude goes to my supervisor Professor Patricia Hayes with whom I connected through Dr. Jeremy G. Silvester. Professor Hayes has been part of the journey from the application and admission process, to the proposal writing<sup>3</sup> and finally the dissertation writing. Her patience, encouragement and positive criticism eased my bumpy academic route. Prof. you have really made me, thus, *nau kale mo* (live long).

Many thanks go to staff members of National Library of South Africa in Cape Town, the National Archives and Library of Namibia in Windhoek, the Walvis Bay Municipality and Olukonda Parish, Oshikoto region Namibia for the kind services they rendered me when I was doing research in their institutions.

*Olupandu lwashewa* (profound gratitude) also goes to Asser Mukumangeni of Okongo, Uukwanyama; Nangula Fresian Hamukwaya of Onamhindi, Okalongo; Mbuta Shaanika of Ongandjera; Itendemusa Kandenge and Ndilipo Nambinga, Uukwambi; Nambula ya Andreas Nekaku and Iita yaKadhila of Uukwaluudhi; Andreas Amukoshi of Ondonga and the late Opiipawa Kaapanda of Uukolonkadhi. Those just cited did not only assist with the locating of participants in the former kingdoms, but they introduced me to interviewees with whom I built and developed genuine relationships that encouraged those who partook in the research process to provide me with valuable information. Most of those I interviewed in Ombalantu I knew from my Masters research work.

*Pamba* (God) brought the following directly (and some indirectly) into my life to ease my academic stress: they are Rosvita Hamunyela, Mary Mbewe, (now) Dr. George Agbo, Anthony Nfor Ambe, Mwayi Lusaka, Rosette Sifa Vuninga, (now) Dr. Ndategako S. Iilonga

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<sup>3</sup> The hardest part I have ever felt in my doctoral studies.

and Laimi Nelago Koskima Erckie. I also benefitted from the research experience of Dr. Martha Akawa, Dr. Napandulwe Shiweda, Desiree Mustapha, Anell Daries, Ben Vigne, Brian Larkin, (now) Dr. Robert K. Mukuna, Dr. Erickson David, Pele Mwatunga of NBC, Oshiwambo Service – Oshakati, Kathleen Gowases, Valencia Linnert, Rui Assubuji, Zughra Kenny and Alisa Ayanta. Great thanks also go to Ayanda Khosi, Zelda Rukambe, Albertina Shatona, Ngaike S. Imalwa, Nthama Matsie, Richard Pakleppa, Werner Hillebrecht, Ralph Ntelamo, Ndamian Hangula, Lucia Hafeni, Magdaleena Kaanante, Jane Smidt and Janine Brandt. Thozama Bici (Librarian of Faculty of Arts by then), Thenji Ntwana and Dr. Zodwa Dlayedwa (the last two from the Xhosa Department whom I met through the ‘Shut up and Write’ Retreat), Dr. Adeniyi Olushola of the Division for Post Graduate Studies (UWC) and lastly my junior supervisor Nehoa Hilma Kautondokwa. All of you, *otandi mu kombo kombunda oshoka* (I am indebted), your support realises the Oshiwambo proverb *omunwe gumwe ihagu i toola ona* (one cannot achieve success without the help of others).

Without Ndalinoshisho Kapembe, Naukalemo Kapewangolo, Hambeleleni Kalola, Nangula Akwaanyenga, Jocky Kayoo, Katrina Amupanda, Shekupe shaJacob, Awah Sih, Thembikhosi Monki, Nozanele Ndyati and Fundiswa Xozza as well as Nolubabalo Mekuto-Swaphi and *maNtsikie* Sihawu (Student Housing Manager of Residential Services) I would have not survived the personal emotional storm I experienced in 2015. Your emotive support made me hold on to life and appreciate that no situation lasts forever.

Deep thanks to my mother gwaShivute, the Amuenye family and Elivi Muadulu who when I was busy with the studies took care of Kalapufye, Tulipamue and Mshinga Linekela. Finally, I wish to dedicate this thesis to the late Professor Doctor Didalelwa, Governor of Cunene Province, Angola.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which migrant labour infrastructure and the related operating practices of the South African colonial administration impacted on workers in and from the colonial north-central part of Namibia, formerly known as Ovamboland. This study stretches from the Union of South Africa's occupation of the region in 1915 up to 1954 when the last Native Commissioner for Ovamboland completed his term of office and a new administrative phase began. Infrastructure refers to the essential facilities that an institution or communities install to use in order to connect or communicate.<sup>4</sup> Vigne defines infrastructure as the mode of connections between techniques, practices, social values, cultures, economies and politics.<sup>5</sup> This dissertation deals with two types of infrastructures. The first is the colonial infrastructure, which was comprised of tangible facilities such as medical examination procedures, transport, housing, rations, sanitation and postal and remittance services. The second type of infrastructure was an intangible one, based on cultural resources that included domestic rituals performed around contract labour, human infrastructures and practices of hospitality (*uukwawo wanankali*), all were rooted in the pre-colonial Aawambo beliefs and practices, which passed on through generations even under colonial conditions.

The thesis starts with the preparations and arrangements commonly done for a man leaving home for the recruitment centre, when he is away, and when he returns from contract. It also reveals how the ancient Oshiwambo custom *siku lyoye siku lyamukweni* (a similar proverb is 'every dog has its day') was employed by homestead owners as they welcomed strangers into their homes which later included the migrant labour community. The dissertation goes on to examine the entire recruitment process, explaining why and how the recruiting organizations

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<sup>4</sup> This is my definition of infrastructure, which is based on my understanding derived from my research.

<sup>5</sup> B. Vigne, 'Omeya: Water, Work and Infrastructure in Ovamboland from 1915 to 1968', unpublished MA thesis in Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, 2019, p 2.

classified the workers, and explores the implications of the mandatory medical examination. It also articulates what *okaholo* (the contract) signified to all parties involved in the migrant labour system. The thesis then investigates how workers coped in the new milieu with compound accommodation and communal sanitation systems, unfamiliar climates, as well as different nutrition and diseases. It examines how workers adapted to a new social setting: without family structures and women; with new liabilities to care for their sick colleagues; dealing with death and the impact of workplace mortality on others and families back in the sending area.

The thesis also explores the infrastructure in which migrant workers from colonial Ovamboland engaged before they were introduced to the infrastructure of contract labour. It analyses the approaches and arrangements regarding mortality within which institutions were operating and how those strategies were implemented. The final chapter considers why the colonial administration redirected some of its new technologies and facilities such as remittance and postal services to the migrant labour system in order to serve the contract workers and broader community of Ovamboland. It also deliberates on what the contract labour infrastructure meant to such a society, indicating how people made use of the infrastructures as well as the social impact of these new communication networks. I learned that the colonial infrastructure introduced from 1947 of postal and remittance services served people in ways that were not as oppressive as the other features of the existing migrant labour system infrastructure. The colonial administration ensured that these facilities reached and were accessed by beneficiaries in rural areas of Ovamboland, who greatly benefited from the new services. I argue that many Aawambo eventually adopted these colonial means of communicating (letter writing in particular), a mode they employed across many years, even when the contract labour system was over.

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**Abbreviations of frequently used archival references:**

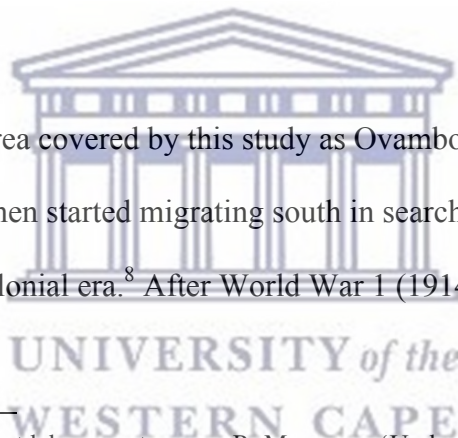
NAN	National Archives Namibia, Windhoek, Namibia
RCO	Resident Commissioner Office, Ovamboland
NCO	Native Commissioner Office, Ovamboland
NC	Native Commissioner
DS	District Surgeon
NAO	Native Affairs Ovamboland
ORS	Ovamboland Remittance Services
OMS	Ovamboland Mail Services
ANC	Assistant Native Commissioner
CNC	Chief Native Commissioner
O.M.E.G.	Otavi Minen und Eisenbahn Gesellschaft
NANFNAO	National Archives Namibia File, Native Affairs Ovamboland
SWA	South West Africa Annual Report (s)
SWANLA	South West Africa Native Labour Association
SAR&H	South Africa Railway & Harbours
UJ	University of Johannesburg

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

Migrant labour is not a new topic of research in Namibian historiography. A number of researchers have written comprehensively about the subject which dates back to the 1880s and ended in the late twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Most of these findings portray the system as dreadful, inhumane and oppressive, although one researcher Shigwedha argues that regardless of the labour system being appalling and exploitative, Aawambo men from colonial Ovamboland constantly signed up for many contracts. The focus of prior studies thus prompted me to explore how people led meaningful lives in the context of such an exploitative labour regime.

In this thesis, I refer to the area covered by this study as Ovamboland.<sup>7</sup> Studies carried out on the stated region show that men started migrating south in search of employment from the 1880s during the German colonial era.<sup>8</sup> After World War 1 (1914 - 1918), the Germans



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<sup>6</sup> For more on the Namibian contract labour system, see R. Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation: the origins of migrant labour in Namibia 1850-1915', pp 1, 10-16: (African Studies seminar paper, University of the Witwatersrand, 1975), <http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10539/9366/ISS-303.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; V. Ndadi, *Breaking Contract: The story of Vinia Ndadi* (Oakland: LMS Information Centre, 1977), pp 1-60; R. J. Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants. Life in a Namibian compound* (Braamfontein: Ravan Press, 1977), pp 1-251; V. Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo. Significant Changes under Colonialism and the Construction of Post-Colonial Identity,' in L. T. Nampala and V. Shigwedha, *Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change. Perspectives from Northern Namibia* (Basel: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2006), pp 208-228; R. Voipio, 'Contract work through Ovambo eyes' in Reginald Green Marja-Liisa Kiljunen and Kimmo Kiljunen (eds), *Namibia The Last Colony* (UK: Longman Group Limited, 1981), pp 116-120; N. T. Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy in Uukwanyama politics, Namibia, 1915-2010' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, History Department, University of the Western Cape, 2011), pp 105-134 and K. M. Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango: A study of the contract labour system in Namibia, 1925-1972' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, History Department, University of the Western Cape, 2012), p 93.

<sup>7</sup> Ovamboland was the name used by colonial officials to refer to the north-central region of Namibia, formerly comprised of seven kingdoms: Ondonga, Ombalantu, Ongandjera, Uukwambi, Uukwaludhi, Uukwanyama, Uukolonkadhi. Its population collectively is called Aawambo. They (Aawambo) speak different dialects such as Oshikwambi, Oshindonga and so forth; *oshi* – indicates the dialect that the group speaks, whereas *o-* for Ongandjera and *uu* – for Uukwanyama for instance indicates the kingdom or region. Although currently the region is divided into four political regions: Ohangwena, Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto, people still refer to areas according to their previous names e.g. Ondonga. In this thesis, I shall use the term *omu* – (singular) and/or *aa* – (plural) to signify people from colonial Ovamboland, while Ova / Owambo denotes the area.

<sup>8</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', p 10; P. Hayes, 'A history of the Ovambo of Namibia ca 1880 – 1930' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, April 1992), p 153.

surrendered to the Union of South Africa military forces, which after some years officially occupied South West Africa (now Namibia). Shortly after the occupation, a military expedition under Major S. Pritchard was sent to Ovamboland to establish friendly relations with Ovambo chiefs.<sup>9</sup> In a report after his visit, Major Pritchard suggested that administrative control over Ovamboland be instituted and two white officials be stationed at Ondangwa<sup>10</sup> and Namakunde. Thereafter the area became a Native Reserve and it was intended as a reservoir for supplying cheap labour to the mining, fishing and farming sectors in south and central Namibia, for the benefit of the colonial companies and settler enterprises.<sup>11</sup> Ondangwa became the colonial administration's headquarters and recruitment centre from where the Northern and Southern Labour Recruiting Organizations operated, which later in 1943 were amalgamated into the South West Africa Native Labour Association (SWANLA) responsible for recruiting workers who went south to work on contract.<sup>12</sup>

This thesis explores the ways in which this migrant labour infrastructure and the related operating practices of the South African colonial administration impacted on potential and recruited workers in and from Ovamboland. The term 'infrastructure' refers to the essential facilities that an institution or communities install for their use in order to connect or communicate.<sup>13</sup> Vigne defines infrastructure as the mode of connections between techniques,

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<sup>9</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 43, 45; Hayes, 'A History of the Ovambo of Namibia', pp 238-239 discussed how the Union of South Africa inherited Namibia as a League of Nations Mandate. See discussion why South Africa administration turned Ovamboland into a labour reservoir in National Archives of Namibia (NAN), Resident Commissioner Ovamboland (RCO) 2, Native Labour 1918.

<sup>10</sup> Ondangwa was situated in the Ondonga kingdom and became the central location for a Finnish Mission Station and parish. Later the South Africa colonial administration turned it into its headquarters.

<sup>11</sup> NAO (Native Affairs Ovamboland) 18, 11/1V1, Annual reports 1924-28; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17; E. N. Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records in Namibia, An investigation of Colonial Gaps in a Post-Colonial National Archive*, (Finland: Tampere University Press, 2015), p 22 states that Ovamboland was the principal labour field for SWA.

<sup>12</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation,' p 15 states that the Northern Labour Organization was responsible for recruiting employees for mines in the north of Namibia. See also Likuwa 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 63, 65; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17.

<sup>13</sup> This is my definition of infrastructure based on an understanding derived from my research.

practices, social values, cultures, economies and politics.<sup>14</sup> This dissertation deals with two types of infrastructures. The first is the colonial infrastructure, which was comprised of tangible facilities such as medical examination procedures, transport, housing, rations, sanitation and postal and remittance services. The second type of infrastructure was an intangible one, based on cultural resources that included domestic rituals performed around contract labour, human infrastructures and practices of hospitality (*uukwawo wanankali*), all of which were rooted in pre-colonial Aawambo beliefs and practices that were passed on through subsequent generations, even under colonial conditions.

To clarify my use of the term infrastructure here, the purpose is not so much a theoretical elaboration of the concept. Instead, I deploy it in a more practical, intermediate and descriptive way that refers to structures embedded in people's lives. It provides a general framework as I explore the dense historiographical ethnography of labour migrancy and the kinds of resources and strategies families used to cope with its challenges. From my interviews for example it emerged that Aawambo installed certain essential facilities which the contract labourers working in the south used to remain connected with the sending area. Migrant workers from Ovamboland were not alone in this, as Moodie argues that mineworkers from Mpondoland in South Africa also used to perform rituals that served as a transition between home and work. In this study, I discovered that these intangible infrastructures formed through ritual performance and observances were the factor that enabled and even enthused migrant labourers to face the contract labour system which researchers have described as oppressive, ruthless and with high mortality rates.<sup>15</sup>

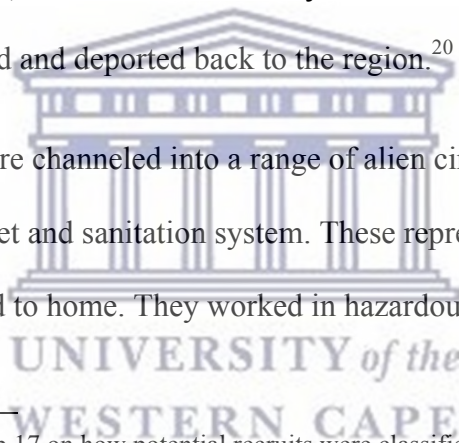
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<sup>14</sup> B. Vigne, 'Omeya: Water, Work and Infrastructure in Ovamboland from 1915 to 1968', unpublished MA thesis in Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, 2019, p 2.

<sup>15</sup> T. D. Moodie and V. Ndatshé, *Going for Gold, Men, Mines and Migration* (London: University of California Press, 1994), pp 2, 16.

At the recruitment centre, men were first classified into different grades according to their apparent physical fitness and bodily strength.<sup>16</sup> The grades were as follows: category A – for very strong males capable of heavy work such as in the mines; category B – for strong recruits, but not as strong as those in category A; category C – for weaker and younger recruits, who were nonetheless healthy. Those in category C were often destined for farm labour. The recruits then underwent medical examination.<sup>17</sup> Those who passed the health check-ups proceeded to the registration office where a lead seal popularly known as *okaholo*<sup>18</sup> was issued, which had to be worn around the neck signifying that the job seeker was successfully recruited, and now tied to a specific employer until the contract formally ended.<sup>19</sup> With the *okaholo* on, the recruits were easily allowed to enter the Police Zone, while those without it were arrested and deported back to the region.<sup>20</sup>

At workplaces, labourers were channeled into a range of alien circumstances and settings that included accommodation, diet and sanitation system. These represented a completely new and unfamiliar life compared to home. They worked in hazardous environments and



<sup>16</sup> See Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17 on how potential recruits were classified.

<sup>17</sup> NAO 18, 11/1V1, Annual Reports 1924-28. The Annual Report for 1925 clarifies that staff including the District Surgeon were placed at Ondangwa and were responsible for labour recruitment. Further information states that the Surgeon's duty was to ensure that the rejected did not leave the region for the south.

<sup>18</sup> According to RCO, No. 2/1916-1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour, *okaholo* (derived from the noun *holo* which refers to lead) was a metal disc with a small hole on one side through which a thin cord or string was passed to hang around the neck of a successfully recruited labourer. Aawambo called the process of putting on the lead seal *oku zala okaholo*. Aawambo also used the name *okaholo* when referring to the contract or labour system generally and prospective migrants as *aanakaholo*. Interview with Leonard Shile and Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga and interview with Jacob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama. The colonial administration proposed the usage of seals as well as metal discs to replace paper ID in 1918. For a discussion of the introduction of discs into the system, see RCO, No. 2/1916-1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour. This correspondence also reports that a consignment of 2500 lead seals and 12 balls of strong thin twine was supplied by the Luderitz Chamber of Mines through the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs, Tsumeb. This meant at Ondangwa that the *okaholo* was tied with a strong thin twine and issued to successfully recruited men to wear around the neck or arm. According to interviewees, the particulars of successful recruits were usually entered into a register by a white recruiting agent. These registers belonging to the recruiting organisations were not available to be consulted at the National Archives of Namibia. Mineworkers upon arrival at their workplaces were also issued metal discs with numbers written on them, for identification purposes.

<sup>19</sup> NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour Recruiting etc., 1924-1929.

<sup>20</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938.

conditions without protective gear and thus were also exposed to the likelihood of various accidents and contracting different industrial diseases that caused many of them to die.<sup>21</sup>

### **Historiographical currents**

Before engaging the history of the impact of migrant labour infrastructure on contract workers in and from colonial Ovamboland, I would like to offer a brief historiographical background of the earlier Ovambo societies. I later relate these to certain aspects of migrant labour, exploring how the contract workers' strategies were operating and the impact the labour system had on the workers.

I learned that the colonial administration in collaboration with investors and recruitment agents ensured that unskilled males were enlisted to work on different colonial development projects and settler enterprises. I also learned that the economic hardships experienced in the region and later taxation became part of the factors that drove Ovambo men to join the contract labour system.<sup>22</sup> Many of the contract labourers demonstrated a degree of obedience to their 'masters' in much the same respectful way as towards their parents and seniors back home,<sup>23</sup> a point that contradicts aspects of Meredith McKittrick's work.<sup>24</sup> This factor as well

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<sup>21</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1929*, pp 78-81.

<sup>22</sup> Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy', pp 108, 138; H. Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change in Ovamboland, 1850-1906* (Societa Historica Fennica: Helsinki, 1990), pp 230-236; Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', pp 4, 10-12; Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 213.

<sup>23</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 162.

<sup>24</sup> The migrant labourers my study deals with are almost in the same age range as the generation that McKittrick's research covers. I argue that most presented themselves as obedient and compliant with their elders and also their employers during their contracts. Perhaps those McKittrick refers to were predominantly Christian converts (*aakriste*) and this category has been emphasized in her study. See Meredith McKittrick, *To Dwell Secure. Generation, Christianity and Colonialism in Ovamboland* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2002). My research suggests the labourers interviewed both valued and appreciated their seniors and looked up to them for advice and guidance, because they were believed to have 'seen much in life.'



as their poverty and unskilled status created a colonial perception of their suitability for migrant work.

To advance investors' economic profits as well as to avoid setting up a healthcare system for labourers in the Police Zone, the colonial administration and its syndicated labour recruiters instituted compulsory medical examinations carried out by medical doctors at the Ondangwa recruitment centre, Ovamboland. Such medical inspections had their origins in the South African gold mines from the late nineteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Concerning workers' lodgings, Ndadi argues that migrant labour housing establishments offered inhuman conditions, which he compares with prison facilities where occupants had no freedom at all. This kind of accommodation also originated in the South African migrant labour system from the late nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

I would like to shift a bit from labour history and give readers the Aawambo precolonial organisation of social and family life background, for them to understand the impact of colonial infrastructure on migrant workers. The main workforce in South West Africa, (Namibia) that came to engage in the South African colonial contract labour system was part of a group of Bantu-speaking people who were thought to have migrated into the region around the fifteenth century. Research suggests that those who today known as Aawambo settled in Oshamba in Ondonga near the Etosha Pan in the south of the Cuvelai floodplain,<sup>27</sup> the region at present known as North-Central Namibia. At different times and for various

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<sup>25</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17; Shigwedha, 'The Pre-colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 213.

<sup>26</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 17-18, 38; Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 200; Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, p 125; Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity, Migrant Laborers in Mozambique and South Africa, c. 1860-1910* (Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand Press, 1994), pp 66-69, 77, 113, 180-181, 187-189 and Butchart, *The Industrial Panopticon: Mining and the Medical Construction of Migrant African Labour in South Africa, 1900-1950*, Soc. Sci. Med. Vol. 42. No 2, 1996, pp 190, 193-194.

<sup>27</sup> NAO, 18, 11/IV1, Annual Report of 1926 reports that the area Aawambo settled in was better watered and fertile, and Hayes in 'The history of Ovambo of Namibia', p 18 confirms that Ovamboland's environment allowed mixed farming.

motives, groups of those later called 'Ovambo' left Oshamba to open up the Uukwambi, Uukwanyama, Ombalantu, Ongandjera, Uukwaluudhi and Eunda - Uukolonkadhi kingdoms, leaving behind a group of those who decided not to move further, who came to be known as Aandonga.<sup>28</sup>

Prior to colonial occupation, Aawambo lived in kingdoms mostly separated by broad uninhabited belts of forest bush country under kingships structured around a hereditary ruler called king (*omukwaniilwa* or *ohamba*), who with the assistance of counsellors or senior headmen known as *omalenga* governed their subjects.<sup>29</sup> Scholars such as Moorsom argue that the majority of floodplain inhabitants were increasingly affected by commoditisation. Long distance trading from the second half of the nineteenth century brought a market for the cattle-trade, which Moorsom argues only benefited the kings, their close associates and a handful of skilled individuals. Such exclusion of the majority from participation in the profitable commercial and related activities pushed men out of their homes to undertake numerous cultural excursions such as hunting and so forth to be able to provide for their families. These pre-colonial administrative conditions, plus some ecological factors experienced in different years in fact paved the way for the South African colonial administration, which occupied the region in 1915, to turn the area into a labour reservoir. The majority of Aawambo men who were coming from increasingly unequal societies were amenable to embracing migrant labour as an opening to sources of income and they signed

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<sup>28</sup> L. T. Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change in Northern Namibia. A comparative study of the Impact of Christianity on Oukwanyama, Ondonga and Ombalantu, 1870-1971' in V. Shigwedha, L. T. Nampala, *Aawambo Kingdoms, History and Cultural Change. Perspectives from Northern Namibia* (Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2006), p 17; M. Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo musical Arts* (Switzerland: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2017), pp 3-4; Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 36, 41, 50.

<sup>29</sup> According to Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 5, Aawambo kingdoms were divided into districts, which were sectioned into wards run by headmen *ooyene yomikunda*. Shiweda, 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 34; Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 45-6; NAO 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report, 1926. *The term omalenga* represents those counsellors identified by the king to assist him administering the kingdom. Their appointment arose due to their royalty, closeness to the king and so forth. An ancient Oshiwambo proverb that says *ino lengwa, omukwaniilwa gwoye ina valwa*, meaning one would only be promoted when the time is right, supports this reading.

various contracts through the Native Commissioner's office at Ondangwa from the early 1920s.<sup>30</sup>

According to Siiskonen and others, the Aawambo who were agriculturalists had settled in a region that was ideal for growing crops. They grew beans, melons, pumpkins, ground beans and mahangu because they matured within the short rainy seasons. From mahangu a nutritious staple meal used to be prepared, served with a variety of vegetables and several other kinds of relish. Aawambo also dried fruits, which they reserved for later consumption.<sup>31</sup> Their drinks were *oshikundu* or *ontaku* (the non-alcoholic drink), and an intoxicating beverage prepared from fresh and dried fruits.

The residential settlements had people living in enclosed, fenced traditional homesteads comprised of numerous small huts where those constructed with mud-packed walls served as bedrooms. Men's sleeping rooms were furnished with beds called *oontazi* (Oshindonga) or *eenhadi* (OshiKwanyama) made out of palm tree branches or the strong branches of other trees such as mopane. On the beds, animal skin hides were used as mattresses.<sup>32</sup> In any Oshiwambo homestead, there were significant sites where crucial family matters were

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<sup>30</sup> Hayes, 'A history of the Ovambo of Namibia', pp 18, 152; Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class-Formation', pp 3-4, 10-11; NAO 18, 11/1V1, Annual reports 1924-1928; Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 37, 39, 43, 50, 58-60, 63-64, 66-67, 230, 234-236; History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning! The Traditional Homestead* (University of Namibia: 2002), p 19; Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 66-67; Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 112; Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy', pp 2, 106-111; Namhila, *Recording and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, p 88; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 14, 17; Miescher, *Namibia's Red line*, p 185. Moorsom's work in particular addresses the issue of inequality resulting from political and trade systems which made kings, their close associates and a handful of skilled people effectively monopolize and benefit from economic resources

<sup>31</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', p 3; NAO 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report 1926; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract* pp 11-12, 14, 16; Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, pp 3-4. Aawambo had been agriculturalists ever since, they tilled and weeded the land the king allotted to them. For details how Aawambo acquired and cultivated the land, see Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 44-45, 52-54, 56, 234; History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, pp 11, 13, 25, 32 and unrecorded conversation with Oscar Shimanya, 10, 29, 12. 2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama.

<sup>32</sup> NAO 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report 1926, Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 35, 45; History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, pp 8, 17-18, 22, 25; Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 66; Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 3; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 12; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi and interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalantu.

discussed: these were the wife's sleeping room or compound called *ondjugo* (Oshindonga) or *ondjuwo* (Oshikwanyama/Oshimbalantu), and the homestead's main centre referred to as *oshoto/oshinyanga* or *olupale*. At these sites, rituals and discussions took place, including those related to taking livestock to cattle posts, planning a hunting trip and later a contract labour term when it fused into older forms of Oshiwambo deliberation or ritual.<sup>33</sup>

The 'public health' arrangements in the pre-colonial era were very simple. Depending on where they found themselves, the following sites were visited when nature called: at home, those who were physically fit would dig a reasonable hole with a hoe in the mahangu field, while those who were sick and women who just gave birth (*aamwali*) used a hoe to dig a hole somewhere in the homestead. When not home, bushes and shrubs if available were made use of and in their absence, an open space (*pongalangala*) was used, all circumstances are called *oku ya mepya* or *kiihwa*. From an early age, Aawambo were educated on how to observe hygiene. While young, everyone was taught that to prevent diseases that result from poor sanitation, one had to use sticks or split mahangu stalks as sanitisers, as well as covering their faeces all the time.

As regards urination, people set up urinal sites within homesteads, the one erected behind *Munyalombe's* (the principal wife) bedroom used only by family members, while those visiting would pee on that site situated near the seating main centre. Aawambo believed that urine kills germs (*aniwa omasita oge sinde uuhwa*) and used them in producing cultural substance called *edhilo*, and this was the motive behind stationing them within the

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<sup>33</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 67; History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, pp 10, 17-18, 25. In an interview with Monika Kalili on 15.05.2016 at Ehungaelo, Ombalantu, she told me that it was the principal wife who was responsible to ensure the sacred fire in the homestead was set before sunset and that it kept burning. For the sacred fire, see also Shiweda 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 58.

homestead.<sup>34</sup> When outdoors and away from the homestead, in the absence of bushes, people would pee in the open.<sup>35</sup>

### Sources, methods and the structure of the thesis

There is a wide range of academic work on the central issues with which this research engages which includes the domestic rites around migration of labourers, and which concerns the contract labour infrastructure such as medical control, housing, rations and sanitation. My research extends to the communication infrastructure comprised of postal and remittance services connected to the labour system. This grouping consequently defines how the investigation of consulted literature is organized.

Bonner, Benya, Moodie and Ndatshe, Harries, Likuwa and Gordon argue that some African communities incorporated into their already existing practices the moral codes of migrant labour, which they eventually made an integral part of their culture. These authors explore how communities performed rituals, some of which were believed to connect workers with home while they were away, and others were believed to spiritually equip and strengthen them to face the possibilities of injury, death and related challenges that the exploitative and dehumanising migrant labour system brought.<sup>36</sup> Except for Ndadi who explains that returning

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<sup>34</sup> In an interview with Aina Pinehas on 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga, she explains that (*edhilo*) a rust that grew on the heavy copper ankle rings (*oongondo / eengodo* worn by women) after being buried for not more than four days under the soil at urinary places, were removed and used in moistening the *olukula* wood when women needed to grind the latter with pestles into powder. History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 21; Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 60.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga. For information on sanitary care of babies, see History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 18.

<sup>36</sup> P. Bonner, 'Labour, migrancy and urbanization in South Africa and India 1900-60', *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 44 (1), 2009, pp 72-73; Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 66-67; Moodie & Ndatshe, *Going for gold, men, mines and migration*, pp 30, 34; A. Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', Unpublished paper presented at the University of the Western Cape, Seminar No: 480, on 9 May 2017, pp 16, 23; Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity*, pp 158, 220-22. See also Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 81, 162; Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 245.

labourers in Ovamboland were expected to arrive in the homestead at twilight,<sup>37</sup> I find no literature in Namibian historiography written from this perspective. Such silence made me inquire of people living in rural northern Namibia whether there are related points supporting Ndadi's argument.

Butchart, Benya and, Wallace as well as Shiweda, Ndadi and Likuwa argue that compulsory medical inspection was instituted in the labour system to facilitate the selection of healthy and fit African male bodies to engage in multiple contracts.<sup>38</sup> During my fieldwork, I found out that physical fitness was not the only requirement used to select recruits, but *oofolomana*<sup>39</sup> (local assistants) employed additional benchmarks in picking potential recruits. Such variance forced me to inquire more generally how the recruitment process at Ondangwa was conducted and why the community of migrant workers publicly accepted the medical examination which some researchers describe as dehumanizing and degrading.

Part of the work of Butchart, Gordon and Harries contributes to our understanding of accommodation and living conditions, the most crucial aspect of the South African and Namibian labour system infrastructures. Their research provides a rationale behind the introduction of compound housing, and details of what occupants were fed as well as sanitation offered in such accommodation. The Union of South Africa *Witwatersrand Mine Wages Commission Remuneration and Commission of Employment of Natives Report*

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<sup>37</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 30-32.

<sup>38</sup> Butchart, 'The Industrial Panopticon: Mining and the Medical Construction', pp 185, 187-188, 191-192; Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', pp 28-32; M. Wallace, *Health, Power and Politics in Windhoek, Namibia, 1915-1945* (Switzerland: P. Schlettwein Publishing, 2002), pp 225-227, 235, 238, 244; M. Wallace, *A history of Namibia* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2011), pp 154, 210, 234, 236; Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 106; Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 83, 89, 93; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17.

<sup>39</sup> According to Leonard Shile and Oscar Uupindi Kamati interviewed on 27.05.2016 at Alusati, Uukwambi, *oofolomana* is the term used to refer to African males who assisted white officials with recruitment processes at the Ondangwa centre. Some of them were employed as interpreters or to take charge of potential recruits and their physical selection whom they would send up to the examination centre for medical check-ups. For more about *oofolomana*, see NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V2, Annual Report, March 1929; NAO 3, File Number 1/5, Subject: Native Staff, Part II, 1946; NANFNAO 9, 11/1V4, Annual Report, 1931.

produces information on accommodation of both compounds, and housing on farms. Apart from workers' sustenance and housing that Gordon's work contributes to Namibian historiography,<sup>40</sup> the entire question of lodging and sanitation on Namibia's farms and hospitality industries is neglected and this drove me to research the subject.

Oshin's work on the modes of transport that the British colonial administration and partners in Bauchi province in Northern Nigeria employed to convey mineral products to the Benue River ferries,<sup>41</sup> encouraged me to investigate how the colonial office stationed in Ovamboland networked with other offices in the region and countrywide. Such networking would include how the Resident Commissioner and later Native Commissioner conveyed and received their postal mail, the only regular mode of long-distance communication used at the time. Other research on postal services<sup>42</sup> link with this study's inquiry into why the colonial administration redirected the services of the post office at Ondangwa towards the Ovambo population in the late 1940s. Here, I explore how the Ovambo people, most of whom lived in rural areas, embraced and benefited from such modern infrastructure. This study also analyses how mail was despatched to owners in different former kingdoms after being collected from the Post Office headquarters.<sup>43</sup>

Moodie and Ndatshe, Gordon, Ndadi and Maphosa in their studies argue that to improve their living standards, African families allowed members to migrate to workplaces and expected

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<sup>40</sup> Butchart, 'The Industrial Panopticon: Mining and the Medical Construction', pp 185, 187-188, 190-194; Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, pp 53-63; Harries, *Work, Culture, and Identity*, pp 197-198; Union of South Africa, Report of Witwatersrand Mine Wages Commission Remuneration and Conditions of Employment of Natives on Witwatersrand Gold Mines and Regulation and Conditions of Employment of Natives at Transvaal undertakings of Victoria Falls and Transvaal Power Company Limited, 1943 (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1944), pp 29-31, 34-35, 41-42; Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 142, 146; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 21.

<sup>41</sup> Olasiji Oshin, 'Developing infrastructure of exploitation: The example of colonial transport on the Bauchi Tin Fields, 1902 – 1914', *TransAfrican Journal of History*, Volume. 17, 1988, pp 123-136.

<sup>42</sup> Metropolitan Post Office, London, *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, Vol. 1. No. 6, 1853, pp 327, 328, 331; A. W. Currie, 'The Post Office since 1867', *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* (Canadian Economics Association), Vol. 24, No. 2. May 1958, pp 241-242, 245, 248, 250; D. M. Eley, 'The early days of the Post Office', *Botswana Notes and Records*, Botswana Society, Vol. 9. 1977, pp 37, 39.

<sup>43</sup> NAO 10/1, Postal Matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

them to remit items home that were hardly found in the sending areas. The cited works link with this study's objective to examine why the colonial administration inaugurated the Ovamboland Remittance Services in the region in the 1920s, which became another mode that labourers used in remitting items home to their families in the sending area.<sup>44</sup> In this case, I investigate how the Ovambo communities embraced and engaged such services as well as the benefits such facilities brought. The study also explores the shortfalls that labourers in the south and beneficiaries in far-off parts of Ovamboland experienced regarding the remittance service.

The number and causes of deaths in labour industries are provided in the Report of the Administrator of South West Africa of 1929, as well as in Harries' work on Mozambican migrants in South Africa. This highlighted another aspect of the colonial policy in the South West African contract labour system which prevented other family members especially wives from escorting their husbands to workplaces, but rather forced them to wait at home until they completed their contracts. This feature connects to my earlier research work where I argue that Aawambo had a strong support system of caring for loved ones when sick, as well as in handling deaths in general. Thus by structuring the absence of families from migrants' work lives, the contract labour policy presented new challenges. This situation made me long to inquire, who, in the absence of families in the migrant labour infrastructure, took up the responsibilities of performing rituals around sickness and death. What was the impact those deaths had on co-workers, and how was this grievous news received and how did it affect families in the sending areas? Although Namhila's recent study did not directly contribute to issues and questions raised in this study, it helps immensely to develop an understanding of

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<sup>44</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, pp 213, 215; Moodie and Ndatshe, *Going for Gold, Men, Mines and Migration*, p 33; F. Maphosa, 'Remittances and Development: The impact of migration to South Africa on rural livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe', in Jonathan Crush & Bruce Frayne (eds) *Surviving on the move: Migration, Poverty and Development in Southern Africa* (Cape Town: Idasa & Development Bank of Southern Africa, 2010), pp 133-136, 138-142; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 16.



how deaths of workers who died on contract were administered, a subject that also surfaces briefly in Likuwa's study on Kavango migrant workers who died in South Africa.<sup>45</sup>

To clarify issues and answer questions that this study addresses, I engaged several modes and sources of inquiry beyond secondary sources, namely archival and official documentation (including photographs) as well as oral history. These different sources relate to each other in one way or another, often supplementing each other's information but at times also providing contradictory input.

Much of this thesis explores how Ovambo people experienced different aspects of migrant labour infrastructure and in fact this could only be done through engaging oral sources. Oral history therefore gave me the power and offered spaces in which to access first-hand information from those who lived through or heard about those experiences. Through this method I was able to actively engage with interlocutors, reading interviewees' body language, observing how they were answering questions and sometimes relating this to difficult issues people might not want to talk about. I argue that most archives and written sources cannot offer such detailed insight. My intimate and accumulated familiarity with the subject and the social issues surrounding migrant labour as well as of the cultural practices of the Ovambo people were an added advantage as it enabled me to dig out, think through and ask about matters in an in-depth manner. Another strength of oral history is that it not only gives very fresh and different perspectives, but also a certain leverage and credibility that other sources originating in colonial archives do not have. This is not to say that I disregard other sources, of course they are also important and they were consistently used to cross check, confirm and validate information provided by oral sources where they dealt with the

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<sup>45</sup> Report of the Administrator of South West Africa for the year 1929, pp 78-85; Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, p, 55; Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 54, 83; Namhila, 'Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate Records"', pp 86-88, 91-93, 103-113, 159-163, 170-17; Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 58-65.

same subjects. In fact oral sources helped me to ask particular questions in the archives. But in the end these oral sources make my research powerful and set it apart from earlier research undertakings about migrant labour that do not have this level of insider detail. In this sense the study is intended to enrich the historiography on migrant labour in Namibia more generally.

The study has also engaged with a number of relevant photographic images. One can argue that they are not only a reflection of the time and space of the photographer in the moment they were recorded, but they allow us to engage with the world of migrant labour by offering precise visual documentation of its physical structures at the time.<sup>46</sup> These often provide supplementary details that are not recorded or remembered in other sources.

What motivated me to collect material about migrant workers' experiences that a number of scholars had previously overlooked were the local narratives that I heard and also read in fiction literature, such as *Tsenaye* by Abed Shiimi yaShiimi and *Omahodhi gaavali* by Hansa Daniel Namuhuja.<sup>47</sup> These touched for instance on the relationships of workers and their 'masters', accommodation, mail collection from local parishes, and other related details about contract labour. I was convinced that the fictional content did not just arise from a vacuum, but must have been based on experience, thus I decided to take a methodological approach by employing the above-stated sources to back up my hypothesis. It is from this perspective that most of this new knowledge was generated, while some developed from informal discussions.

Oral sources which I employ in this study have at times been regarded as 'unreliable.'

Regardless of its critics, scholars such as Luise White and Antoinette Errante inspired me to

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<sup>46</sup> E. Edwards, 'Photographic Uncertainties: Between Evidence and Reassurance' in *History & Anthropology*, 25: 2 (2014), pp 174-175 & J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2014), p 192.

<sup>47</sup> This was during my primary and secondary schooling.

seriously engage with it. In her work *Speaking with Vampires*, White cautions historians working with oral accounts that “people do not always speak from experience, but speak with stories that circulate to explain what happened, understand what had previously been incomprehensible and that make those stories to be ‘true’, though not reliable”. She continues with advice that to closely evaluate the ‘evidence’ produced, historians must interview informants more than once.<sup>48</sup>

I also engaged with Errante’s methodology, where she encourages historians to build interpersonal relationships with an interviewee before they engage in interviews, as that makes information exchange flow more easily. She also advises further that one has to allow informants to tell as much as they remember about the event.<sup>49</sup> I took this advice and employed these methods which gave this thesis a new purposefulness, and which helped to constitute the chapter on how traditionally Aawambo prepared those going on *okaholo*.

I used the above approaches with seventeen former contract labourers in the former Ovamboland kingdoms who migrated south during the terms of office of Shongola<sup>50</sup> and Nakale,<sup>51</sup> and combined these with three interviews I conducted in December 2012 and again in December 2013.<sup>52</sup> This dissertation altogether is comprised of ordinary interviews and informal discussions amounting to forty-one in total. As a way of creating a continuous

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<sup>48</sup> See A. Portelli, ‘What makes oral history different’ in R. Perks and A. Thomson (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp 64, 67, 71; J. W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), pp 191-192; K. Maree and C. van der Westhuizen, ‘Planning a research proposal’, in J. W. Creswell, et al (eds), *First steps in research* (Pretoria: Van Schaik Public Publisher, 2007), pp 35, 37; L. White, *Speaking with Vampires: Rumor and History in Colonial Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp 30-31, 33, 38, 41-42, 47-48.

<sup>49</sup> White, *Speaking with Vampires*, pp 47-48; A. Errante, ‘But Sometimes You ‘re Not Part of the Story: Oral Histories and Ways of Remembering and Telling’, *Educational Researcher*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (March., 2000), pp 16, 18, 20-22.

<sup>50</sup> Carl Hugo Linsingen Hahn (locally known as Shongola) was the Native Commissioner in Ovamboland from the 1920s up to the beginning of January 1947.

<sup>51</sup> H. L. P. Eedes locally known as Nakale kEhomato became a Native Commissioner for Ovamboland after Hahn’s retirement in 1947.

<sup>52</sup> Regarding these interviews, I spoke to several interlocutors who worked as migrant labourers about Ondangwa in relation to *okaholo*.

narrative thread, Vendelinus Kashindi from Ehungaelo, Ombalantu is the one person among the seventeen former migrant workers interviewed whose testimony allows readers to track how he experienced the contract labour across several different thematics, as he contributed to almost every chapter of this thesis. More generally, given the liberty to tell all they could remember about the events, those who lived through the direct experience and then secondarily women informed me about the arrangements and preparations concerning migrant labour. The former contract labourers related an enormous amount about their voyages as they tramped to and from the recruitment centre, and the relationships with and services offered by people in houses along the way, and why. They communicated a great deal about recruitment procedures, lodging, sanitation, and rations at Ondangwa as well as at places of employment. Migrant workers who lived through the experience of contract labour, and the secondary informants including those who witnessed this history while growing up, also provided information on the postal and remittance infrastructure.

A former migrant worker by the name Sem Ekandjo contributed information to the discussion of the implications of mortality in this dissertation.<sup>53</sup> Although he confirms he had witnessed the particular death that was the subject of my research, due to lack of literacy he says he has no idea when it took place.<sup>54</sup> However, he provides valuable information on the arrangements the employer made concerning the event as well as the impact that the death had on him. I would like to acknowledge the weakness of oral history especially that I encountered with Ekandjo, and at the same time admire it because through questioning and crosschecking the deceased's family members who experienced the loss I found out exactly when the death

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<sup>53</sup> Sem Ekandjo's first contract was in 1943 and continued into that of the new phase of administration (conducted mostly in Afrikaans), which started from about 1955.

<sup>54</sup> J. Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (James Currey: London, 1985), pp 178-179.

under discussion took place. Such testimony also revealed how grievous news reached home as well as the effect it had on the family.

Issues that frequently appeared in most interviews were categorized as common themes and I argue that they really assisted me in filtering oral accounts. Those subjects regularly talked about affirmed a consistency in what I researched, while the lesser-mentioned topics were checked for reliability and I then determined their usage or exclusion from the study.

As stated above, besides the oral accounts, I also engaged archival materials as well as photographs. Documentation consulted extended to the voluminous literature found among the official publications from C. H. L. Hahn's personal library housed in the UWC Library, Cape Town; the records of the Section of the Parks and Cemeteries Division of the Walvis Bay Municipality, and the Olukonda Parish book of the deceased. I argue that the archival accounts helped immensely in cross-referencing, producing dates, and verifying and validating the oral stories which form the ground of this study.

Chapters of this thesis have been arranged in a manner that is both chronological and thematic. The first chapter answers questions that researchers and perhaps readers have concerning why Ovambo men, regardless of the harshness of the contract labour system, continually engaged it. It shows how Aawambo communities adopted the contract labour system, and integrated it with their already existing culture. It also provides details on preparations and rituals performed when one departed for *okaholo*, while away at work and when returning home from *okaholo* as well as the motive behind each rite. It also explores the relationships and survival of migrant workers outside their own communities.

The second chapter addresses recruitment procedures which sent the qualified men to the south. It again explores the colonial health provisions for the black population, which became the colonial administration's primary focus following its occupation of the territory. It

explores why the state used health as a tool in controlling black mobility to urban centres rather than to fulfil the League of Nation's mandate. It also talks about *okaholo* (the lone visible item) and its significance in the migrant labour system's operation and the ways in which labour categorization created new forms of male social hierarchy.

The third chapter of the dissertation gives an overview on how the contract labour became systematized, where the migrant labourers experienced colonial and capitalist strategies through carefully designed infrastructures. It explains how migrant workers directly experienced the colonial apparatus through the labour migration project, which shaped their habits, senses and embodied experiences of the power of the state. The chapter also focuses on the ways in which the infrastructure disciplined the bodies of migrant workers and created forms of surveillance and control as well as the ways in which worker agency evaded or shaped the system. The fourth chapter investigates a more productive side of colonial administration when it redirected to the Ovambo community the colonial infrastructures such as remittance services and communication resources such as post office. It explores how labourers in the south were communicating with their loved ones in the sending area as well as how the Ovambo community back in the region accessed and made use of those infrastructures for their own purposes.

## CHAPTER 2

### PREPARATION AND ARRANGEMENTS FOR A MAN LEAVING ON *OKAHOLO*

Most accounts represent the Aawambo as originating in groups who gradually migrated from the east to south-western Africa and settled for a while at Oshamba in Ondonga,<sup>55</sup> Ovamboland.<sup>56</sup> Different precolonial Aawambo communities widely share the same culture, which include beliefs, rituals and so forth, although names and the way they used them differ from kingdom to kingdom.<sup>57</sup> Shigwedha argues that a set of traditions was carefully set in place to regulate decent behavioural attitudes in the community, to be responsible, obedient, respectful and reverent, fulfil obligations and safeguard the overall welfare of individuals and others. This body of traditional knowledge was transferred through oral means to succeeding generations by parents.<sup>58</sup>

Ninety-five year old Vendelinus Kashindi revealed that parents only passed on the consequences of such customs to the young ones, but never told them of the meanings behind those norms.<sup>59</sup> His argument supports Ndadi's case, where he describes how he had no thorough knowledge about why he had to return home at night from contract in 1950, despite reaching his home area at one o'clock in the afternoon.<sup>60</sup> Kashindi confesses that he learnt on his own that the taboo of leaving home early in the morning had really nothing to do with witchcraft, but was just to encourage the one journeying to travel while it was cool and with little interruption. He further clarifies that the scary consequences attached to each set of taboos was to make the younger generations obey such norms.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 17.

<sup>56</sup> See NAO 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report, 1926.

<sup>57</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 17.

<sup>58</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', pp 231-233.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>60</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 32.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi.

Historically, Aawambo men who were providers and protectors for the households and territories<sup>62</sup> used to engage in numerous expeditions such as hunting,<sup>63</sup> taking animals to cattle posts,<sup>64</sup> serving in the kingdoms' armies as well as raiding<sup>65</sup> and collecting salt from saltpans near Etosha.<sup>66</sup> Those excursions were carried out in groups and their duration varied from a few days to a year or two.<sup>67</sup> From the 1880s, young Ovambo men began migrating in search of employment in the south<sup>68</sup> and like the black South African communities of the nineteenth century,<sup>69</sup> Aawambo also incorporated themselves into the contract labour system of the colonial economy. They added it to their already existing forms of expedition and made it part of their culture. Culturally, Aawambo instituted rituals which performed a particular purpose for each excursion they undertook.<sup>70</sup>

Because the contract labour that Aawambo fused into their cultural practices was dangerous to engage in, with high mortality rates, very bad labour conditions and meagre wages,<sup>71</sup> they decided to align parts of its associated ritual to that of men going to war.<sup>72</sup> This chapter deals with how the Aawambo of northern Namibian communities fully prepared the departing potential migrants for the contract labour system overseen by the South African colonial administration from 1915 when the Union of South African occupied the region up to 1954, when the last Native Commissioner for Ovamboland completed his term of office. Owing to lack of literature on how prospective contract labourers' were prepared, the study heavily

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<sup>62</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 66-67.

<sup>63</sup> Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 58-60.

<sup>64</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', p 3.

<sup>65</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 66.

<sup>66</sup> Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 63-64.

<sup>67</sup> Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, p 230.

<sup>68</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', p 10.

<sup>69</sup> Bonner, 'Migrancy and Urbanization', pp 72-73.

<sup>70</sup> Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 112.

<sup>71</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo,' p 208.

<sup>72</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.



relies on a series of in-depth interviews conducted with those who lived through the experiences as well as secondary informants to whom elders passed on the relevant stories.

Moorsom argues that the nineteenth and twentieth-century industrialists in South West Africa were not interested in developing the human resources of the country, except as labour power. The labour recruitment, distribution and control was the colonial administration's primary function.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in early February 1918, the South Africa Resident Commissioner (RC) in Ovamboland Mayor Manning and Chief Martin Kazikua of Ondonga met to discuss the colonial administration's intention of recruiting Ovambo men to work in the Police Zone or Central Namibia,<sup>74</sup> locally known *uushimba*.<sup>75</sup> A few days after the said meeting, the Resident Commissioner and his colleague Mr. Dickman went as far as Ngwari in the extreme south east of Ondonga on an expedition to promote contract labour. Apart from such a campaign, messages concerning the labour demand also passed to returning labourers when they passed through the Ondonga Residency rest camp after the long walk from Tsumeb.<sup>76</sup> The administration's campaign was necessary, as at the time the labour flow was low and it reported that some men went without passes via the Outjo route and were not recorded with their office.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', p 1.

<sup>74</sup> According to M. Akawa, 'The Gendered Politics of the SWAPO Camps during the Namibian Liberation Struggle' in J. Silvester, *Re-viewing Resistance in Namibian History* (Windhoek: University of Namibia Press, 2015), p 242, the 'Police Zone' was established during the German colonial period and reinforced after the League of Nations mandated South Africa to administer South West Africa. It covered the huge area of central and southern Namibia that included the commercial farms obtained by white settlers, while the majority of the black population lived to the north and northeast of this area on communal land.

<sup>75</sup> According to Mr. P. Mbenzi, cited in G. Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line – The History of a Veterinary and Settlement Border* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp 185, 299, the people in Owambo (Aawambo people) called the "Ovaherero" and "Ovahimba" collectively "Ovashimba" and they also called the Police Zone or Central Namibia, the region where "Ovashimba" live, the "Oushimba." The former Police Zone is still called "oushimba".

<sup>76</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, 2, Native Labour, No. 2/1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour; Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line*, p 184.

<sup>77</sup> RCO 2, Native Labour, No. 2/1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour; Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy in Oukwanyama politics', pp 2-5.

As argued earlier, it was a tradition for parents or guardians in consultation with ancestors (whom Aawambo believed were everywhere, close to people and protecting families and villages against misfortune<sup>78</sup>) to engage in lengthy preparations before a family member was allowed to undertake an expedition. The following account is a preparation for a man leaving to go on contract<sup>79</sup> to seek for wealth, including clothes and blankets, which most parents at the time would have wanted to possess.<sup>80</sup> After a young man intending to work in *uushimba* informed his elders of his intention of leaving, the heads of the house would then discuss the matter in greater depth and this included consulting ancestors (*aakwampungu*), who were believed to link living beings with God (*Kalunga*) especially when conducting prayers, which they did through ritual performance.<sup>81</sup> It was only after the ancestors granted permission,<sup>82</sup> received through signs or in a dream,<sup>83</sup> that the person intending to leave was informed by the head of the house of his status concerning whether he was allowed to join the contract labour system or not.<sup>84</sup>

From the time when permission was granted until when he departed, the prospective migrant would from time to time attend additional private educational sessions and serious discussions with the elders in the house.<sup>85</sup> Interviewees acknowledged that during such 'lessons', they were cautioned and advised to stick to and not abandon home teachings; to

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<sup>78</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 19.

<sup>79</sup> RCO No. 2/1916-1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour.

<sup>80</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 208.

<sup>81</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 19-20.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbilwe, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu.

<sup>83</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 19.

<sup>84</sup> B. Bozzoli, with assistance of Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng; Consciousness, Life strategy, and migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983* (London: James Currey, 1991), p 97 and interview with Regina Shaimbilwe, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15 -16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interviews with Leonard Shile and Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera and interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga. See History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 11, where it states that such talk was different from the normal one that takes place at the main meeting area held after supper.

avoid bad influences; to be obedient to their masters; to work hard and return to improve the economic situation at home.<sup>86</sup> Mothers specifically warned their sons that *epata letu ihali li poshikangwa* (in Oshikwanyama) or *ezimo lyetu ihali li uupule* (in Oshindonga), meaning our family does not engage in witchcraft-related deeds and if one does, one would run mad.<sup>87</sup>

Not everybody took the elders' teachings in the same way. Some strictly followed the instructions, while others disobeyed them. In this regard, eighty-four year-old Aina Pinehas (born on 20 August 1932) informed me that as a young girl she witnessed the arrival of her cousin Nampala Ankonga from contract who was in an unsteady mental state, resulting from when a friend lured him into applying some lotion to encourage women to love him.<sup>88</sup>

From roughly 1930, those who intended to go south for the first time also had to apply to obtain a Tribal Fund (formerly Tribal Trust Fund) registration certificate (*okakalata*



<sup>86</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15 -16. 05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yLithete, Uukwaluudhi; interviews with Leonard Shile and Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera and interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga. See also Moodie and Ndatshe, *Going for Gold, Men, Mines and Migration*, p 30.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Tresia Nghilokwa, 28.12.2015, Oneheke, Okalongo; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15 -16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Frans Weyulu, 28.12.2015, Oshivanda, Uukwanyama. Interviewees argue that Oshiwambo culture dictated that although mother and father parented the child together, the mother had a vital role to play in their children's life, as they culturally belonged to them. The Oshiwambo expressions *okaana okakwao kaina* and *mondha ihamu zi ezimo* supports such argument. That now clarifies why the mothers took up such responsibilities of cautioning their sons not to engage in the stated behaviour. See also Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, pp 151-152.

<sup>88</sup> The System Manager, South Africa Railways and Harbours Windhoek reports to the NC Ondongua that an investigation revealed that goods (personal effects of Ovambo Impala Nampara – mental patient) were sent to Ondongua per Road Motor Service and delivered to a member of the Commissioner's staff, Mr. D. Greyling on 6 July 1945. Such correspondence dated 12/04/45 and appeared in NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9 (Complaints, cases, enquiries and disputes outside Ovamboland Part I, 1939-1946). Aina Pinehas shared with me a story that I find very close to the one above, of his cousin Nampala Ankonga who returned home from a contract in a mentally disturbed state. Since the file failed to clarify whether Nampara fell ill while at work or went on contract as a mental patient, that somewhat convinced me that Pinehas's account and the story in this file might be talking about the same person. Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

kefendelo) from the Tribal Offices in the different kingdoms,<sup>89</sup> and they had to be eighteen years and above, though in some cases younger ones tried their luck (see Figure 1).<sup>90</sup>

*Duplicate*  
N. S  
N. A. 22

“A”

Geregistreeerde Nommer  
Registered Number  
*1/12/14*

Stam  
Tribe

**Stamfonds. Registrasie-Sertifikaat.  
Tribal Fund. Registration Certificate.**

Uitgereik aan  
Issued to  
*Uripanuel*

Besonderhede.  
Particulars.

Naam van Vader  
Father's name  
*Ekhondjo*

Voorman  
Headman  
*Ushiku*

Kraalopperhoof  
Kraal Head  
*Self*

Gebied (Omkunda)  
Area (Omkunda)  
*Utapi*

Opmerkings  
Remarks  
*hindle afrom 1929*

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WESTERN CAPE

CS Scanned with CamScanner

<sup>89</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V2, Annual Report, 1929 and Vendelinus Kashindi interviewed on 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu also contributed on the said subject.

<sup>90</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941; unrecorded conversations with Oscar Shimanya, 13, 29.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Okalongo and interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

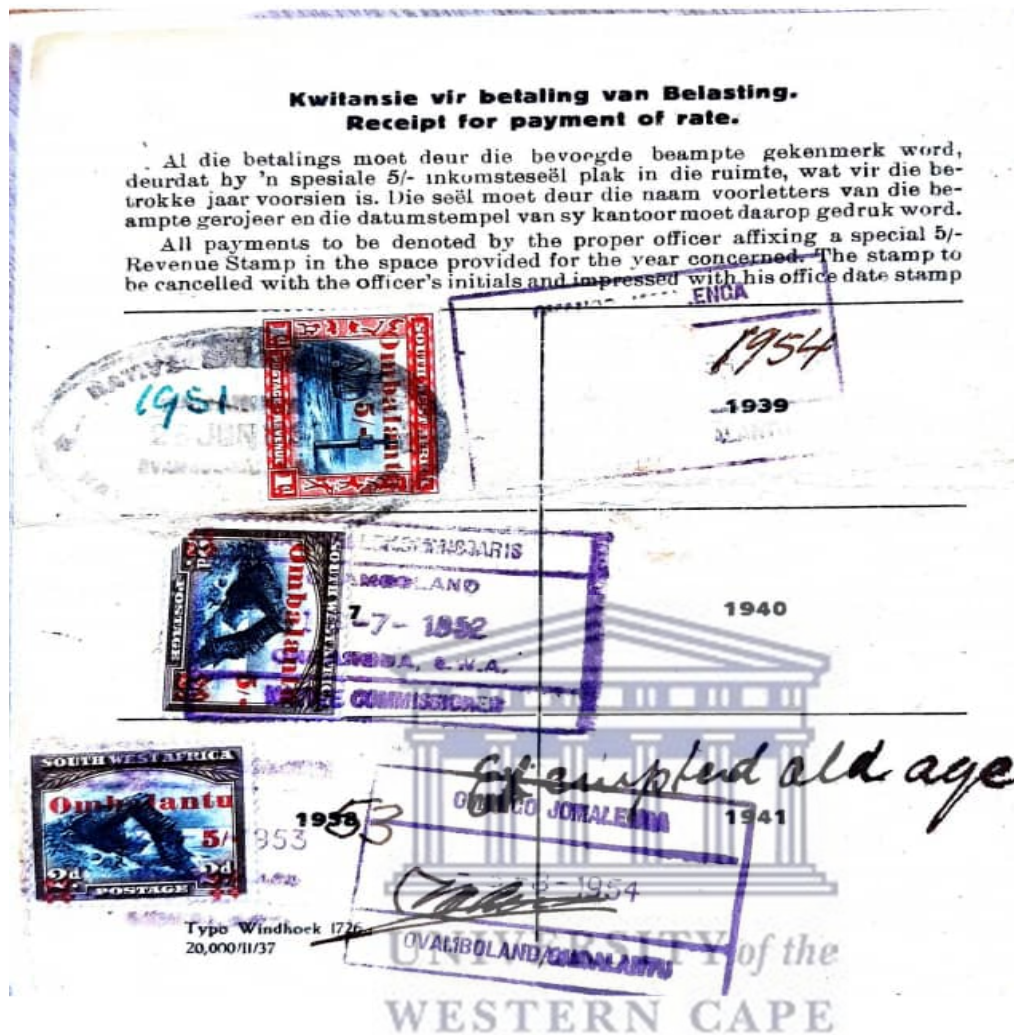


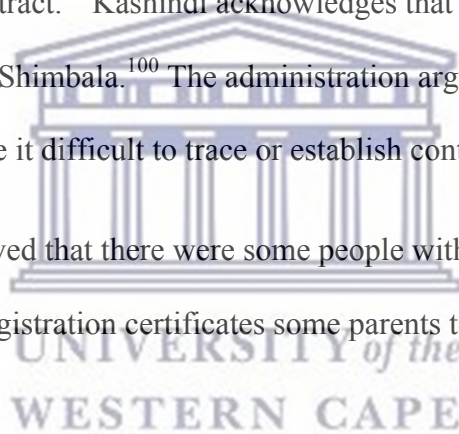
Figure 1: Uripamwe Ekandjo Tribal Fund Registration Certificate. Courtesy: Elifas Ekandjo, Outapi, Ombalantu, Omusati Region, Namibia.

Information that the registration certificate carried was essential, as it was used in tracing the families or relatives in case a migrant died on contract,<sup>91</sup> in tracking down those who

<sup>91</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, pp 117-118.

breached their contract,<sup>92</sup> and by employers who wanted to have their former employees back in their service.<sup>93</sup>

Another necessity of Tribal Fund registration certificates was that they should differentiate Ovambo of Namibia from ‘Angolan natives’.<sup>94</sup> Vendelinus Kashindi (a ninety-five year old) who joined the contract labour system in 1939, says the dearth of money in the region meant that Tribal Fund registration certificates were accessed at the cost of one liter jug full of *mahangu* (millet) grain, and were to be updated annually.<sup>95</sup> In the queue (*omutete*),<sup>96</sup> some Ovambo men of Namibia sidestepped the registration certificates and registered themselves with false identity papers<sup>97</sup> or as Angolans,<sup>98</sup> to avoid being traced and sent back to work should they breach their contract.<sup>99</sup> Kashindi acknowledges that he once registered himself by the Mbangala name Mateus Shimbala.<sup>100</sup> The administration argued that labourers cheating their systems generally made it difficult to trace or establish contract labourers’ identity.<sup>101</sup> Traditionally Ovambo believed that there were some people with evil intent,<sup>102</sup> thus after acquiring the Tribal Fund registration certificates some parents took the probable migrants to



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<sup>92</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing “Native Estate” Records*, p 125; NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V2, Annual Report, 1929.

<sup>93</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>94</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/V4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu. Here, Kashindi is actually referring to the payment of annual tax.

<sup>96</sup> *Omutete* is an Oshiwambo concept that means queue. The term also used in the migrant labour community referring to when prospective recruits stood next to each other in the open *va shaama* (Oshikwanyama) *ya tegama* (Oshindonga) forming up a queue waiting for the foremen to do the physical selection, before presenting them to the white supervisor at the centre. Andreas Muleka remembers one white man at their time locally known as Kaupa (gourd) who confirmed their bodies’ fitness before sending them to the medical examination centre. People also referred to the site where recruitment was taking place as *omutete*.

<sup>97</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual reports 1924 – 28.

<sup>98</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9, Complaints, Cases, Enquiries and Disputes (outside Ovamboland), Part I, 1939-1946; NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

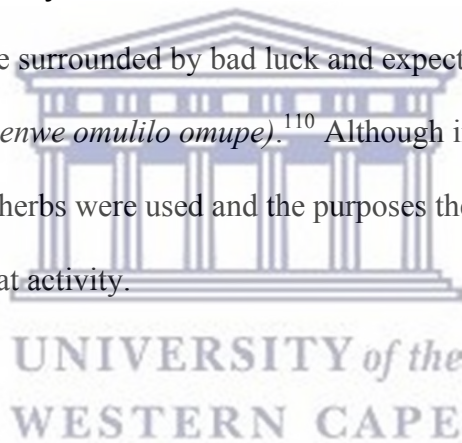
<sup>99</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing “Native Estate” Records*, p 125.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>101</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual reports 1924 – 28.

<sup>102</sup> M. Salokoski, ‘Symbolic Power of Kings in Pre-colonial Ovambo Societies’ (Licentiate Thesis in Social Anthropology, University of Helsinki, 23 March 1992), p 215.

herbalists or medicine men<sup>103</sup> to cleanse them of any misfortune (*omipy*),<sup>104</sup> which it was believed could affect someone's life by those who felt envy or jealousy towards them.<sup>105</sup> Those who visited these specialists were issued with numerous herbs including part of the tuberous herb plant called *elago* (Oshindonga) /*elao* (Oshikwanyama) which means luck,<sup>106</sup> as well as protective medicines, amulets and talismans, some of which were applied on the face or worn around the ankle, waist or neck.<sup>107</sup> These all meant one could easily be picked out from the crowd, liked by the employer,<sup>108</sup> or promoted.<sup>109</sup> One eighty-five year-old interlocutor, Titus Kamweethako from Uukwaluudhi who underwent his first *okaholo* in 1949, confirms the belief that existed among the migrant community that those picked right away were deemed to have lucky charms. Those who were not selected after several attempts believed that their faces were surrounded by bad luck and expected to return home for spiritual uplifting (*ya ka temenwe omulilo omupe*).<sup>110</sup> Although interviewees deliberated much on the subject of how herbs were used and the purposes they served, interlocutors denied having engaged in that activity.



### ***Egumbo omukulukadhi***

<sup>103</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change, p 21.

<sup>104</sup> Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, p 220.

<sup>105</sup> Salokoski, 'Symbolic Power of Kings', p 215.

<sup>106</sup> This study often provides terms in both Oshindonga and Oshikwanyama, and henceforth will indicate with a forward slash (/) between the two terms in these respective languages. Interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera and interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu. Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, pp 151-152.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera; in.terview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga and interview with Paul Penda Tjilondelo, 22.08.2016, Omaenene, Epalela, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera.

<sup>109</sup> Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, p 220; Salokoski, 'Symbolic Power of Kings', p 217; interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

A homestead with a responsible wife who conducts herself in a good manner towards all members and visitors to the house, as well as ensuring all arrangements that took place in the homestead were properly done, is the one the Oshiwambo phrase refers to as: *egumbo omukulukadhi*.<sup>111</sup> She, the Owambo woman, was linked to the kitchen, the most essential unit of the traditional homestead where food is prepared.

In collaboration with the husband, women (in the case of polygamy) received *mahangu* (millet) grain to be pounded into flour by younger female members of the household or from the area. When the flour dried, it was deposited in two clay pots called *olwiyo/oshikalungu*. One was stored in a hut where the finished food and kitchen utensils were kept (*ondunda yokusiikilila*), while the other was kept in a pantry (*elimba*) where food items such as flour, dried meat, fish and other foodstuffs in much quantity were stored. It was placed on three slightly damaged clay pots, to prevent flour from getting moist especially during the rainy season. A clay pot in the pantry was kept for those who were away from home and was expected to have *mahangu* flour at all times. This was to signify that those absent from the home would be spiritually fed and remain strong when there was little or nothing to eat, knowing that back home there is abundant food.<sup>112</sup> If by accident, it ran dry,<sup>113</sup> *mahangu* granules *eemuma/eendjeke* believed to serve the same purpose as flour were deposited within it and only removed when the refill was done.<sup>114</sup> This kind of practice is close to what

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<sup>111</sup> Interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>112</sup> History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 13.

<sup>113</sup> Although people tried to prevent the clay pot from running dry, Ligoleni Mukongo argues that there were inadvertently chances when flour got finished and *mahangu* granules were deposited in to avoid it being empty. That occurred when a mother for instance was nursing a sick relative far away and it was not yet time for the husband to issue grain.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi.



shepherds at Jooste farm in Mariental district from 1946 to 1950 had been practising, whom Ndadi argues ate only once a day.<sup>115</sup>

Women ensured that the flour in the pantry was replaced with a fresh supply from time to time, to prevent it from getting old.<sup>116</sup> Interviewees confirm that under such flour there used to be buried dried spinach discs equaling the numbers of those who were away. The spinach discs were believed to signify protection so that, even if those absent from home were to be involved in accidents, they would always escape unharmed. Keeping the flour and spinach discs safely was another way of having food readily available any time when those away arrived back.<sup>117</sup> Likewise, Likuwa argues that Kavango women only took a little flour from that which the migrant carried and kept mixing it with newly pounded flour, and then prepared a meal from it to celebrate the return of migrants.<sup>118</sup>

***Onghuta***<sup>119</sup> *yomunakaholo*

Culturally, when men were leaving home for days, they used to carry enough *onghuta* to consume while journeying and on arrival at the destination. Prior to departure day in the afternoon before sunset, the possessions of the person leaving (the food and all he was taking along) were brought and placed at the centre of the seating area of his mother's or first wife's

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<sup>115</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 21.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga and History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 25.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga and History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 25.

<sup>118</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 81.

<sup>119</sup> Culturally *onghuta* (Oshikwanyama) or *onguta* (Oshindonga) refers to food that somebody leaving home for many days will eat or take along for later consumption. In this context, it refers to food that prospective men fed on as well as what they took along to consume while journeying and arriving at Ondangwa recruitment centre.

bedroom,<sup>120</sup> in the same direction of the sleeping room entrance. These preparations were scheduled to take place at the sleeping room where life is believed to have been created.

According to interviewees, that was the way of wishing the departing one well and to return home alive.<sup>121</sup> Such a person was also educated to believe that in case death occurred, his spirit would enter the world of the ancestors.<sup>122</sup>

An elderly woman used to guide a selected young virgin girl (who never engaged in sexual intercourse) to prepare the departing person's food and possessions that he was taking along. Culturally, it was believed that she would bring luck to the one leaving, because she was pure and unpolluted. In the absence of such a girl, the mother could prepare for him, provided she has abstained from sexual intercourse for a number of days prior to the preparations, as it was believed that *omalo/ondjuwo* (sexual intercourse) brings bad luck. Interlocutors say men going to war received the same treatment.<sup>123</sup>

Rituals that some people had been performing when men went to war were also performed for those on contract, because the labour system was regarded as harsh and exploitative.<sup>124</sup> Andreas Muleka outlines details about the ways such rituals were performed by a clean woman who had not engaged in sexual dealings that day. In a kneeling position at the main sleeping hut entrance facing outside, she would sieve with an empty sifting basket for ochre (*ta fifa nongalo yokufifa olukula*). The performance was done early in the morning, while

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<sup>120</sup> Interview with Tresia Nghilokwa, 28.12.2015, Oneheke, Okalongo; interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga, clarify that the seating area referred to in Oshikwanyama is called *olupale, okashotona* in Oshimbalantu and Oshikwaluudhi, and in Oshindonga *oshinyanga shondjugo*.

<sup>121</sup> Interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>122</sup> Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, p 158; Nampala 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 58.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>124</sup> Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy' pp 51-52, 105, 120; Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 208.

everybody was asleep to avoid interruptions. Muleka argues that the ritual was a protection prayer for those away on cruel labour contracts.<sup>125</sup>

Various foods including ready-to-eat mahangu flour, wild spinach discs, dried meat and portions of salt were prepared and put in the departing person's leather bag.<sup>126</sup> Some also took along dried beans for relish.<sup>127</sup> They also carried clay pots, or five-liter tins called *uungulungulu* (see Figure 2) which Oscar Kamati says they used in 1933 as cooking pots on one farm.<sup>128</sup> Gourds filled with water were also taken along.<sup>129</sup> Nutritious items that were ready to consume differed from group to group. Aakwaluudhi carried *mahangu* bread/cake (*oshima*), a mixture of cooked beans and sorghum (*onkundenona*), palm fruits, a non-alcoholic drink (*oshimbototo*), crushed wild berries (*oshihendembe*),<sup>130</sup> and cooked and dried smaller worms (*uutulu*) picked from *iitulu* bushes.<sup>131</sup> Migrants from Uukolonkadhi carried *mahangu* bread (*oshikwiila*), palm fruits and crushed wild berries (*oshimbandula*).<sup>132</sup> Aakwanyama took along *mahangu* bread which they called *omungome*, cooked *mahangu* grain (*omusheka*), wild berries (*eembe*) and jackal berry fruits (*eenyandi*).<sup>133</sup>

Leevi Namwiha from Omulondo, Ondonga, used to commute and only carried a gourd of non-alcoholic drink (*ontaku*) and *mahangu* bread (*oshikwiila*), which he consumed for

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga. For information about *olukula*, see Shiweda, 'Omhedhi: Displacement and Legitimacy', pp 51-52.

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbile.20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu; interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yaIthete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>129</sup> Interviewed migrants agreed that they carried gourds of water.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Titus Kamweethako 04.01.2016, Ontanda yaIthete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>131</sup> Interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yaIthete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Petrus Taanyanda, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yaIthete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>133</sup> Interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama and interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

breakfast and lunch when returning home after *omutete*.<sup>134</sup> The Ndonguena carried butter, beans, palm fruits and cracked marula nuts (*omahuku*). Those who traveled at seasons when wild and jackal berries and palm fruits were ripe were supplemented with such sustenance they carried along the journey.<sup>135</sup> The departing migrants from Ombalantu were discouraged from carrying and eating *mahangu* bread (*ohima* - a similar name to the term for tortoise). The community believed that the one who eats it would be slow like the tortoise and others would leave him behind when he rushed to join *omutete*. The tortoise characteristic caused it to be removed from the list of foods prepared for Mbalantu departing migrants.<sup>136</sup>

According to eighty-four year old Monika Kalili from a polygamous house (due to her father marrying four wives and later in 1963 herself marrying into a polygamous marriage), says that this preparation slightly differs with the one from a polygamous household. Kalili, who says she was one of the girls in her area, who used to prepare food for departing migrants, reveals that it was the responsibility of the principal wife (*omukulukavi wopepata enene*) to make preparations for anybody leaving home. If she had problems with other wives (*oonyamunghwao*), then the husband would authorize biological mothers to prepare for their leaving sons, but making use of the first wife's facilities.<sup>137</sup>

Interviewees confirm that the departing person left immediately after having his meal, which he ate alone. It was strictly restricted to thick mahangu porridge (*oshifima*) served on a mahangu sifting basket (*ongalo yoluti*) which symbolizes good luck,<sup>138</sup> served with a dried wild spinach disc connoting that he would be protected from accidents until he returns home. A big needle (*oniho/onghumbo*) was placed alongside the porridge, signifying that he would

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<sup>134</sup> Interview with, Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

<sup>135</sup> Interview with Paul Penda Tjilondelo, 22.08.2016, Omaenene, Epalela, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>138</sup> History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 15.

be picked from a crowd (*a pitile meyulu longwiya*).<sup>139</sup> In all kingdoms, it was confirmed that no departing person was served meat as it was believed that he would fall victim to wild animals on the way.<sup>140</sup> In Ombalantu and Ondonga, leftovers were left in place, but covered with a big basket,<sup>141</sup> while in Oukwanyama the basket dishes were taken to the storeroom where they were kept for the time being, as the seating area would be in use.<sup>142</sup> Remaining food was later given to children to consume when they woke up, because they were regarded as innocent and believed to bring luck to the ones on the journey.<sup>143</sup> In their absence, the mother ate up everything. She was expected not to go out, but to spend the entire day home as well as to avoid quarreling, as that was believed to cause bad luck to the traveler.<sup>144</sup>

### Tramping to Ondangwa

Departing migrants left home carrying their belongings at the ends of the stick or palm stalk placed on the shoulders, constituting what is called *omutenge/i*.<sup>145</sup> Tramping and carrying



<sup>139</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu; interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu; interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu; interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Nambahu Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with Tresia Nghilokwa, 28.12.2015, Oneheke, Okalongo; History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 9.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Uuholondema, Ombalantu and interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>144</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 82.

<sup>145</sup> *Omutenge/i* in this instance was described as a social custom intentionally established to teach young ones not to spend what they earned, but to first present it to parents mostly to fathers (who were believed to be God's representatives) to bless it. As I argue above, *omutenge/i* was instituted to teach and encourage young ones to always involve elders regarded as more experienced in their plans. It was also believed that parents could advise the young better about how to spend their hard-earned cash and they were expected to pass the same advice to the next generations when they grew old. Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi.

*omutenge/i* changed by the end of the period covered by this study when modern transport was introduced to the region. Prior to that, the prospective migrant would meet others at an agreed site and time, mostly ranging between dawn, after the first chickens' cry or when the Magwila star is out (the time of male youths returning from courting - *taa galuka ko ku gwila*), which is said to be three o'clock in the morning (European time). After dividing up who is to carry blankets, water and so on, they departed as a group.<sup>146</sup> Paul Tjilondelo<sup>147</sup> says to avoid obstruction from outsiders of whom some might wish the departed bad luck, the departing news was only known amongst the parents and fiancée, and the rest only came to know when the departed person succeeded in getting a contract.<sup>148</sup>



<sup>146</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Leonard Shile and Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi. Interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga. See also Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 81; Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line*, p 183.

<sup>147</sup> Paul Tjilondelo is sixty-eight years old, former principal of Oluno Secondary School now Andimba Toivo yaToivo School in Oshana region, where I matriculated. He is a son of Sakaria Nangenda Tjilondelo, from a Ndongona community whose oral history suggests they migrated into Namibia from Angola around the nineteenth century and settled in Uukolonkadhi jurisdiction. Nangenda was Omaenene headman and South West Africa Native Labour Association agent in the area responsible for issuing food (maize meal and salt) to Angolan potential migrants proceeding to *okaholo* in the early 1950s. Paul says his father's relationship with the South African administration was cut short when on 25 April 1955 he was murdered by Angolan colonial authorities because of his politics. He says his half-brother Michael Mulamba took over the office up to 1959 (when the SWANLA camp at Ombalantu stopped operating). Interview with Paul Penda Tjilondelo, 22.08.2016, Omaenene, Epalela, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>148</sup> Interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.



Figure 2: Ovambo men travelling, carrying their possessions. Remarks: They might be going for migrant labour, but more probably on *ohambo* (herding at the cattle post), 190? Source of Postcard: National Archives Namibia. Reference number: 02507. Remarks: the man standing on the right carries *Okangulungulu*, the kind of tin used as a cooking pot during contract.

Prospective migrants tramped different distances, which were determined by how far each one's ward was situated from the centre of the kingdom as well as weather conditions when they traveled. Interviewees from Uukwaluudhi in the west remember spending the first night at Eendobe, the second night at Okaonde kaSheendo (both of these places are in Uukwaluudhi), the third night they slept in Uukwambi and on the fourth day, they reached Ondangwa in the afternoon.<sup>149</sup> Daniel Shooya (aged ninety-two year old) from Uukolonkadhi clarifies that the first time he traveled to Ondangwa was in 1941 to enlist for the Native Military Corps (during World War Two), in which he says did not succeed, as he was underage.<sup>150</sup> In 1942, he tramped to Ondonga, as *omunakaholo* (a contract man). He says the

<sup>149</sup> Interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>150</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; Ndadi *Breaking Contract*, p 16; Native Affairs Ovamboland, 20, 11/1, Annual reports, August to December 1941.

number of days they traveled was determined by the weather; otherwise they used to spend five to six days on the road. He tells how during rainy seasons, their flour got soaked by rain showers or fell from the head as they crossed *iishanas* (water channels) full of water. He also remembers Uukwiyu waTshasile near Ogongo and Iiheke yaNakele water points, both in Uukwambi where they collected water for drinking and preparing supper during summer seasons.<sup>151</sup>

Isaak Shaanika and Israel Shingenge from Ongandjera went south in 1950 and they say it took them two full days to reach Ondonga,<sup>152</sup> while Vendelinus Kashindi who went on contract in 1939 and Bathoromeus Amulungu in 1946, both from Ombalantu also journeyed to Ondangwa in two days.<sup>153</sup> Paul Tjilondelo says the Ndongona and migrants from Angola tramped for three days from Omaenene (at his father's house where they collected food) to Ombalantu. In Ombalantu they camped under Onambelega jackal berries called Omatelekela (meaning the place where one cooks food) and crossed Uukwambi in two days. Onambelega became a station for Aambangala<sup>154</sup> when going or returning from *oushimba* (Police Zone).<sup>155</sup> Jakob Shatipamba from Eenhana, who went on contract for the first time in 1948, says they tramped for three days to Ondangwa.<sup>156</sup>

Leevi Namwiha from Omulondo, located twenty-eight point six kilometers east of Ondangwa, joined the contract labour system in 1953. He says that he and others never camped at Ondangwa but were commuting. The family prepared dinner earlier for the person

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<sup>151</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 86-87.

<sup>152</sup> Interviews with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera and Isaak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>154</sup> According to Vendelinus Kashindi, Aawambo referred to people that live in the northern direction *uumbangalantu* of Ovamboland as *aambangala*.

<sup>155</sup> Interview with Paul Penda Tjilondelo, 22.08.2016, Omaenene, Epalela, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama.



departing on *okaholo*, so they could leave at twilight and meet up with others on the way. They reached Oniipa<sup>157</sup> before dawn and always killed time by engaging in numerous conversations as they rested in the open (under the moon) waiting for dawn (*ya tega eluwa li tende*). He says they avoided taking a nap, because they feared to oversleep and get late to *omutete*. Before leaving Oniipa, they used to hang their gourds of non-alcoholic drink on the Oniipa jackal berry branches. While there, they also halved their *mahangu* bread, each eating a piece for breakfast and dropping the other pieces at his uncle Silvanus Mbango's house in Onguta location. They collected their *iikwiila* (mahangu bread) and *oontaku* (non-alcoholic drink), which they consumed in the afternoon on their way back home.<sup>158</sup>

#### ***Aanakaholo* accommodation in Uukwambi and at Ondangwa**

Aawambo developed an approach that the heads of houses engaged in when dealing with strangers (*aayendanandjila*) seeking accommodation, initially experienced with men searching for cattle that went amiss and later trekkers tramping to and from Ondangwa after the introduction of contract labour. Accounts say that at homesteads where elders or males were absent (and where they feared being attacked at night), they always referred any strangers to go and check accommodation in the next houses (*ka tu na omulalo, sha po ota mu tala momagumbo ga landula ko*). Homestead owners with inadequate sustenance to feed strangers also referred them further.

Travelers who were looking for accommodation in Uukwambi say they were given options to choose whether they wanted to be housed (*kutya otaa lala*) or just provided with a meal (*nenge otaa li*). Homestead owners created options, as they knew travelers' situations where

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<sup>157</sup> According to Namwiha Oniipa is the ward located one point five kilometers east of Ondjondjo ward, where *omutete* used to take place.

<sup>158</sup> Interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

those going to Ondonga had food, while those returning home after failing or being rejected had consumed their food at Ondangua while waiting to be recruited. Those who opted to be housed were allowed to prepare their meals and slept in the open area of the traditional homestead, while those who chose to be provided with a meal had to find where to sleep, provided that they have eaten.<sup>159</sup> Camping in the open was not a new thing to Aawambo men as they were used to that during hunting and other expeditions. Shooya contributes to the issue by saying that migrants used to camp in the open near homesteads and in the Iilugudhi forest that bordered Uukwambi and Ondonga.<sup>160</sup>

Shooya argues further that although they had been approaching homesteads before sunset, they sometimes hardly secured accommodation and the situation forced them to camp in the open near homesteads.<sup>161</sup> Oscar Kamati confirms that when trekking to *okaholo*, they received little hospitality, compared to when they were returning from the south as *aanamoonda*.<sup>162</sup> Homestead owners were happy to house returning labourers as they benefited much from them. Workers returning from farms bartered ostrich eggshells with them,<sup>163</sup> some exchanged maize meal<sup>164</sup> with that of *mahangu*, and when *aanamoonda* bought and slaughtered a goat the family that accommodated them were left with meat to

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<sup>159</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera; Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Leonard Shile and Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>160</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 32; Miescher, *Namibia Red Line*, p 186.

<sup>161</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>162</sup> In an interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi he says *omunamoonda* (singular) and *aanamoonda* (plural) was the term used to refer to any labourer who returned home from towns and/or places in the south. Aawambo of the time also referred to those places in *uushimba* by their synonyms or praise names for instance, Swakopmund (*Ombundu yaKiiyala*); Windhoek *Omukuto gwaKaiser (Kaisha)/gwaNaambo naAlina*; Walvis Bay *Ombaye, (Mungadu waShiweda oshilongo shoolema, kiiyela hai kotamene omeya)*; Outjo *waNepando u na eembulu dikedi/oohahu*; Mariental *Omalinga nomukwena*; Keetmanshoop *Okaiti*; Luderitz *OLiindili*; Tsumeb *Oshomeya* and Oranjemund – *Okawe*.

<sup>163</sup> From ostrich eggshell, some skilful Aawambo prepared beads called *omihanga* that girls and older women wore around their waists.

<sup>164</sup> When returning home, *anamoonda* purchased maize meal at Ondjondjo shop to consume on the way. Because it used to be a long time without having mahangu meal, they usually exchanged such flour with that of mahangu. Kamati argues that people in far off areas were always happy to have such a scarce commodity.

consume.<sup>165</sup> Isaak Shaanika from Ongandjera (who joined *okaholo* in 1950 for the first time) strongly defends the Aakwambi attitude towards those who sought for accommodation, arguing that they feared to be attacked or robbed (especially in houses where husbands or men were absent). Therefore, to avoid risking their lives by taking in strangers, people would refer migrants to the next house. He further shared information that when accommodated with his fellow men in one house where the entrance was tied up (*ontu ya pandekwa*) and men in that house kept coming to check why the dogs were barking, it was an indication that they were afraid, because they had strangers staying.<sup>166</sup>

### *Aanakaholo pOndangwa*

Migrants who had traveled to Ondangwa before sought accommodation in homesteads where they had boarded before, and they introduced new migrants to homestead owners who hosted them free of charge. If they could not find spaces in homesteads, they proceeded to the *pondok* (where all who know nobody in the surrounding area boarded) located near Ondjondjo.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>166</sup> Interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera.

<sup>167</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour Recruitment 1940-1944; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 48.



Figure 3: SA Railways Road Motor Services Terminus, Ovamboland Bus, Passengers and Bystanders. 1951. Photographer: De Kock, J. On the left in the photo there is a *pondok*, constructed by the South African administration to accommodate recruits awaiting transport to Tsumeb. Interviewees state that prospective recruits who did not know anybody's house and those who found homesteads in the surrounding area full were said to have lodged at the above pontok, awaiting to be recruited. Source: National Archives of Namibia, reference number: 3771.

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They spent days at Ondangwa hoping to be recruited. Those rejected returned home disappointed<sup>168</sup> and only expected to go back when they were fit to pass the medical tests.<sup>169</sup>

Aanakaholo remembered homesteads they used to lodge in while waiting to be recruited and they include that of Petrus Shiyukifeni<sup>170</sup> located west of where Ondangwa Open Market is today (where the last *omutete* site was located), and Nekulu IyaMvula locally known as *Shitekula mapongo* (the one that feeds and accommodates strangers), situated south of

<sup>168</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour recruiting 1920 – 1941.

<sup>169</sup> NAO, 6, 2/1, Labour Recruiting, Part VII, 1945.

<sup>170</sup> Petrus Shiyukifeni's name appeared in correspondence in NAO 10/1 Postal Matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

Ondjondjo shop.<sup>171</sup> There was also Johannes Kangumu,<sup>172</sup> Hamaulu and Boy Shifandune who worked as an interpreter at the Administrative Centre,<sup>173</sup> Neputa at Omwandi gwaKamanya,<sup>174</sup> Josef Kathindi Omakango gaAsser yaKano.<sup>175</sup> Jesaya Ingula at Enkono and Leonard Ashipale,<sup>176</sup> as well as Ludwig Benjamin located west of the administrative centre (where OK Food shop is situated today).<sup>177</sup> *Aanakaholo* acknowledged that due to the lack of sleeping quarters in those houses, they had been sleeping in the open space (*pehale*) of large traditional homesteads. In the summer and rainy seasons, they were allocated a traditional hut to keep their food (which they cooked together) and blankets.<sup>178</sup> Muleka, Kashindi and Shile say that in some houses *aanakaholo* were allowed to cook for themselves, while in others they handed over food to be prepared in the main houses. To save food as the migrants were not sure how long it would last, an agreement was reached that they would only always have dinner when everybody was back home from the recruitment centre.<sup>179</sup>

Jakob Shatipamba from Eenhana Uukwanyama, who went south for the first time in 1948, says that all the time he had been lodging at the *pondok*, because he knew no homestead to accommodate him in the surrounding area. He further articulates that, to save their food over weekends, they had been going around homesteads to assist with sowing, weeding or threshing for a meal.<sup>180</sup> During agricultural activities, those lodged in homesteads used to weed in the morning before departing to *omutete*, while some assisted with the same work in the afternoon or over weekends.<sup>181</sup> Vendelinus Kashindi who had been boarding in different

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<sup>171</sup> Interview with Hileni Ipinge, 06.01.2013, Etambo, Ondonga.

<sup>172</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>174</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

<sup>175</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

<sup>176</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>177</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>178</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama.

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

homesteads informed me that in some houses, if they assisted with any activities, they were served with food from the main house.<sup>182</sup>

Aambwela and Iimbundu as people from Angola are locally called, had also been competing with Aawambo prospective recruits and at some points they were allowed to register with the Ovamboland Tribal Trust Fund in 1938 and started enjoying the trust fund benefits like Aawambo.<sup>183</sup> They feared that if they returned to Angola after being away for a long period the Portuguese were going to heavily tax them.<sup>184</sup>

### **Returning and arrival of *aanamoonda***

Former contract labourers reveal that they used to arrive in the sending area in numerous ways. Some who returned were accompanied by police after being arrested, either because they overstayed (*ya thondola*) in the south,<sup>185</sup> or they deserted their work places.<sup>186</sup> Others were sent home because they were sick and not fit to be in employment.<sup>187</sup> There were also those who completed their contracts and I address this group in detail.

Ndadi who returned home from his first contract in September 1950 relates that he brought along heavy goods, which made him hire a man waiting to be recruited for the job of carrier. Returning labourers also had an option of leaving their stuff in homesteads around Ondangwa to collect them later.<sup>188</sup> Petrus Kalola and Jeremia Shikongo supported and confirmed Ndadi's argument, that some men worked hard and brought home suitcases full of things (*ya*

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<sup>182</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>183</sup> See NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938.

<sup>184</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

<sup>185</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Abiatal Tomas, 27.11.2016, Onandomba, Ondonga.

<sup>186</sup> NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V4, November 1931; NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report, October 1927.

<sup>187</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9, Complaints, cases, enquiries and disputes outside Ovamboland file, Part I, 1939 – 1946.

<sup>188</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 30-31; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

*etelela ookofa tadhi tsuwa ongolo*).<sup>189</sup> Whatever goods returning labourers brought home did benefit everybody, including family members and the community at large. Therefore, sharing one's earnings with others earned them fame in the community, which easily qualified them to have fiancées.<sup>190</sup> Returning labourers who never got a chance to buy goods in the south to take home, would come and do the shopping at Ondjondjo; they also included maize meal for consuming on the way back home.<sup>191</sup> Eighty-five year old Hileni Ipinge, when housed at her relative Nekulu IyaMvula at Ondjondjo, tells how she and other people used to sell palm stalks at 2 shillings to returning labourers who tied their belongings on *omutenge/i* and marched home.<sup>192</sup>



Figure 4: Ovambo migrant workers at the Namutoni checkpoint, probably on their return from contract, undated, probably 1910s. Source: National Archives Namibia, reference number: 28281.

<sup>189</sup> Interview with Petrus Kalola, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukualuudhi.

<sup>190</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 209.

<sup>191</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Hileni Ipinge, 06.01.2013, Etambo, Ondonga.

The returned worker's arrival marked a joyous moment to the family, indicated by the mother's ululation and softly uttering *omukwetu a thika*,<sup>193</sup> *ofuka ya yoolola*,<sup>194</sup> meaning our loved one safely returned home. To the neighbours, ululation meant good news is received in such a house.<sup>195</sup> Returning labourers were expected to arrive in the house at night. This backs up Ndadi who related that when he returned from his first contract in 1950, he reached his home area around one o'clock in the afternoon, but he only returned to the house around nine o'clock at night.<sup>196</sup> The custom is interpreted by Jakob Shatipamba as instituted to allow one enough time to rest before facing the family which he had not seen for a long time.<sup>197</sup> A returning Ndongona labourer reached home at suppertime; as he approached, he blew on *okafilita*<sup>198</sup> alerting them of his arrival.<sup>199</sup>

In all former kingdoms, a returned labourer was prepared the same type of food, taken from the clay pot in the pantry, using the same basket dish, but no needle was placed alongside the pap and the meal was taken at the main seating area. All was done differently this time as the person was considered safe from the competition and dangers of migrant labour. If he arrived back before people went to bed, he was served the meal, but if he reached there late, the same food was prepared in the morning to celebrate his return. A returned worker would sleep in the main reception area, because his bedroom, which had been not in use, was dusty and could not be cleaned, since nobody knew when he was returning. In the morning, parents

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Petrus Kalola, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>194</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>195</sup> Interview with Paul Penda Tjilondelo, 22.08.2016, Omaenene, Epalela, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga and interview with Petrus Kalola, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>196</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 32.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama.

<sup>198</sup> *Okafilita* is a musical instrument which a person blows to make a melodic sound.

<sup>199</sup> Interview with Paul Penda Tjilondelo, 22.08.2016, Omaenene, Epalela, Uukolonkadhi.



interviewed him while observing his conduct to check if he was behaving the same before he went south.<sup>200</sup>

If no strange behaviour had been noticed in him, he then went to his father's bedroom seating area and would present him *omutenge/i*, indicating what he was to take and leave out of the suitcase, as some goods belonged to co-workers and were to be delivered to families and relatives. On his first return from contract, the labourer tried to acquire items such as a blanket, the durable jacket Aawambo called Kapenzina, hat, trousers, loincloths *omalapi gokuzala* and an amount of money as *omutenge/i* for the father. In return the father would give a young female cow called *hokoosho*.<sup>201</sup> The returning labourer would tell the father to hand the mother a waistcloth (*a ka ninge ompuku*)<sup>202</sup> and to cut some into smaller pieces<sup>203</sup> for his siblings to cover front and rear part of the body (*va lambidhe*).<sup>204</sup> Shaanika explains that culturally the father had all rights to take charge of his children's lives, not because fathers were greedy but because he was considered God's representative, and he was bestowed with the power to bless his children who conducted themselves in the proper manner and curse (*te va fiile omate mail/ye ta tula omutima*) those that disobeyed him.<sup>205</sup>

One Ndongona returning from his first contract tried to get the linen, blanket and suitcase for the father and in return, he received a female young cow (*ondema*). The mother received cloths for *tjitenge* and *omaleshe* that women covered their heads with, the fiancée received cloths (*omalapi*) and metal wristbands (*okagondo*), while grandparents and good neighbours

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<sup>200</sup> Interview with Regina Shaimbile, 20.05.2016, Ouholondema, Ombalantu; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga and interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>201</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi. *Ongombe homutenge* is also another name given to the cow that one received after offering the father *omutenge/i*; Bozzoli with Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng*, p 91.

<sup>202</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2016, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

<sup>203</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes', p 209.

<sup>204</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>205</sup> Interview with Isaak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera.

were given spoons, knives and metal plates. Contract labourers interviewed acknowledge that in all communities, people were grateful for whatever item they received and they always wished the issuer the best and prosperous life. Argument says migrants who had been generous received many gifts especially when they were getting married.<sup>206</sup>

### ***Ina mu ka lya uulekenisa? Ngandi or ntumba okwe ya po***

Such a phrase was heard all over in the far-off areas, when somebody with information about the arrival of a certain *omunamoonda* in the area indirectly wanted to deliver the news to another person. One circuitously informed the other, if he or she for instance had not visited Shatumbu's house (as he just returned from south). That was how news of a returned labourer's arrival spread and interested people started visiting.<sup>207</sup> Those that spread the news either saw a returned labourer watering animals at water points in summer,<sup>208</sup> or the neighbour (who were aware of those away south) could also suspect that somebody had arrived, should they notice for example an increase in the number of participants on neighbouring mahangu fields during the weeding season.<sup>209</sup> Shigwedha argues that detergents of the time used to smell several meters away,<sup>210</sup> and interviewees confirm that those that passed by and smelled scented soaps at a house where they knew somebody had been in south also spread the news of the arrival.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo' p 209.

<sup>207</sup> *Uulekenisa* is a term derived from the concept *lekker* taken from Afrikaans language meaning something good, and in English they are called sweets. Interview with Oscar Uupindi, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>208</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

<sup>209</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga,

<sup>210</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 223.

<sup>211</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; interview with Monika Kalili, 15.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Ligoleni Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Oscar Uupindi, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

Interviewees argued that because modern goods were hard to find in remote areas,<sup>212</sup> the *aanamoonda*'s arrival attracted so many people, amongst whom were relatives, invited guests such as the fiancée, friends of the family and uninvited ones including 'wicked people'. All came to welcome the returned worker back and hoped to receive goods that were determined by their relationship with the returned labourer. Items mostly issued were blankets, smoking pipes, matches, safety pins (*oosipela*) *uulekenisa* (sweets) and bars of soap (*oothewa dhoongungunyenge/oonkunkutu*). The fiancée might receive textiles, a *taschentuch* or handkerchief well known by the Aawambo as *okanasituke*, a needle and threads tangled on mahangu stalks and much more.<sup>213</sup> Shile smiles as he remembers some of the *aanamoonda* including himself who used to organize a coffee day and invited members of the community to come enjoy *okafe/okapyu* served in a scooping or drinking vessel made from a calabash (*omhindo/ompamba*). He mentions further that those who attended never stopped telling others how much they enjoyed it.<sup>214</sup>

Earlier on I mentioned that among visitors were 'vindictive people' who could be relatives or members of the community. Such people were culturally believed to be against others' progress and could spiritually block them from prospering. If a malevolent person visited the *omunamoonda*'s house, he or she was told that the returned one was away delivering the co-workers' parcels (although he was around). The returned person was cautioned by elders not to give the evil person something, as it was believed that he or she would destroy him.<sup>215</sup> If for instance he gave money to such a cruel person, he or she was believed to have the spiritual capacity to make him neglect his family and spend his earnings on non-relatives. If

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<sup>212</sup> Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line*, p 188; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>213</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 230; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi. *Taschentuch* was amongst the items in the lost and found personal effects of a returning labourer found on the road to Ondonga beginning of the week of 18/5/45. NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9 Complaint cases, Enquiries and disputes (Outside Ovamboland, Part I, 1939 - 1946).

<sup>214</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>215</sup> Salokoski, 'Symbolic Power of Kings', p 215.

they (the returned worker and the mean person) by accident bumped into each other, *omunamoonda* would give an excuse that many people came by and there was nothing left to offer. If the evil person asked when he had arrived, the answer given was that he had been around although he just returned a few days ago. When queried about his next contract, the response would be after two or three months, although he would be leaving tomorrow. Through norms and customs, young ones were taught not to give out information about their lives to people, some of whom might be scheming and could destroy or block their plans.<sup>216</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter explored the ways in which Aawambo were from an early age culturally prepared to conduct themselves according to shared cultural beliefs that included caring for strangers. The said teachings groomed the Ovambo community into responsible citizens who ended up employing empathy by treating one another in the way one would like to be treated. I learnt that the rituals that were performed by Aawambo were instituted to serve the same purpose as that of prayers which I argue in most cases meant good wishes for the wellbeing of their loved ones, and that those who did not make it would have joined the ancestors' community. This chapter clarifies why the young ones of the time were obedient and followed the elders' teaching blindly; something that I argue eventually kept such a community intact and benefited it for so long. In this section, I also learnt how the expression *okugandja okutsilika/omulongelo ohagu kutha omukwao melimba* was fulfilled, indicated by what those who had been generous received afterwards. In this chapter, questions that

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<sup>216</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Oshivanda, Uukwanyama; interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi.

researchers of migrant labour have raised about why Ovambo men had been engaging in what they claimed to be a harsh and oppressive labour system have their response.<sup>217</sup>



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<sup>217</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo,' p 208.

## CHAPTER 3

### RECRUITMENT PROCEDURE, MEDICAL EXAMINATION AND *OKAHOLO*

This chapter deals with the South African contract labour system recruitment procedures that were taking place at Ondangwa, Ovamboland from the years 1920 to 1954. It deals with the prospective recruits' physical selection done at the *omutete* site; mandatory medical inspections, taking into account the recruits' own agency; and how such recruitment practices became publicly accepted among the migrant community. It also talks about the lead seals (*okaholo*) worn round the necks of successful recruits, the process which is called *oku zala okaholo*, as well as the metal discs (*uupapa wiitenda*) used as identification by mine employees.

During the early twentieth century, the South African mining industry introduced medical examinations into the labour system with the intention of accurately selecting the strongest African male bodies that could withstand the temperatures of the underground mines.<sup>218</sup> As soon as the South African colonial administration occupied the territory of South West Africa, it copied the South African medical inspection model in its labour system, prioritizing certain illnesses especially sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).<sup>219</sup> The colonial administration, which was responsible for facilitating the contract labour system in Ovamboland and Kavango<sup>220</sup> ensured that native staff<sup>221</sup> to be employed in government institutions and potential recruits intending to work in the Police Zone, were both subjected to

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<sup>218</sup> Butchart, *The industrial Panopticon: mining and the medical construction*, pp 185, 187.

<sup>219</sup> See Wallace, *Health, Power and Politics*, pp 225-227, 235, 244; Wallace, *A history of Namibia*, pp 154, 210, 234, 236.

<sup>220</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 65.

<sup>221</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland (NAO), 3, File number 1/5, Subject: Native Staff, Part II, 1946.

compulsory medical checkups.<sup>222</sup> The administration used medical examinations as a tool to filter the physically fit and restrict those suffering from STDs or venereal diseases, influenza, malaria, small pox, plague and other infectious sicknesses.<sup>223</sup> The colonial administration also used medical inspection results to report the local population's health to the League of Nations or lose the Mandate.<sup>224</sup> South African administration labour offices initially conducted inspections at Tsumeb and in 1924 moved to Ondangwa.<sup>225</sup>

Since then, Ondangwa became a recruitment administrative centre, with job allocations done first at Tsumeb<sup>226</sup> and later Grootfontein.<sup>227</sup> Migrant labour was not introduced in Ovamboland by South Africa, but started with young Ovambo men who migrated south in search of employment from the 1880s.<sup>228</sup> As from 1926, the administration posted white staff responsible for labour recruitment activities to Ondangwa. They were R. S. Cope appointed as a full-time recruiting agent,<sup>229</sup> and the District Surgeon in charge of examining recruits<sup>230</sup> and responsible for the health in the region.<sup>231</sup> In his absence in 1945, Dr. Aino Soini of the Onandjokwe Finnish Mission Hospital used to stand in for him,<sup>232</sup> although the Native Affairs Department pointed out that young Ovambo recruits were not comfortable and were therefore reluctant to be examined by a female doctor.<sup>233</sup> Doctors were to ensure that prospective recruits selected to go south were healthy and fit for work.<sup>234</sup> When the Chamber

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<sup>222</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938; NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V5, Annual Report: January 1932.

<sup>223</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Reports, 1924; September 1925; May 1929; January to March 1948; NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V3, Annual report of the year 1930; NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V5, Annual Report, February 1932; Shiweda, Omhedi: 'Displacement and Legitimacy', pp 121-122

<sup>224</sup> Union of South Africa, Report of the Administrator for the year 1920, p 25.

<sup>225</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938.

<sup>228</sup> Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation,' p 10; NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report 1925.

<sup>229</sup> Hayes, 'A History of the Ovambo of Namibia', p 284.

<sup>230</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report, January 1925; Annual Report June - July 1926.

<sup>231</sup> NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V4, Annual Report, January 1931.

<sup>232</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 11/1, Annual Reports 1945.

<sup>233</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 6, 2/1 Labour Recruiting etc, Part VII, 1945.

<sup>234</sup> NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour Recruiting etc., Vol. 2. 1924-1929.

of Mines set and laid down standards of physical fitness for the natives recommended for the mines, two staff were immediately appointed<sup>235</sup> and later a staff member responsible for issuing passes joined them.<sup>236</sup>

### ***Oofolomana at omutete site***

Andreas Muleka whose first contract was in 1947 and David Silvanus's in 1948 affirm that prospective recruits would reach *omutete* site at dawn, and queue up standing next to each other *va shaama* (Oshikwanyama) / *ya tegama* (Oshindonga) *omutete* while waiting for the foremen (*oofolomana*)<sup>237</sup> responsible for initial physical selection.<sup>238</sup> Those who sought for employment with the administration at the administrative centre were medically examined, but never joined *omutete*. They were also expected to be fluent in Afrikaans or English and if they could not speak those languages, they were recruited on the recommendation of a headman or chief.<sup>239</sup>

Muleka (whose first contract was in 1947) recalls the white labour recruiter known in the migrant labour community by the name of Kaupa (gourd). Kaupa's presence at the site was to finalize the physical selection of potential recruits whom African assistant recruiting agents called *oofolomana* initially selected before the prospective recruits were sent for medical examination.<sup>240</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Union of South Africa, Report of the Administration of South-West Africa 1924, p 78.

<sup>236</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report, January 1925.

<sup>237</sup> *Ofolomana* means foreman, the concept the migrant labour community used widely when talking about African staff in the recruitment structure.

<sup>238</sup> Interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga

<sup>239</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 3, File number 1/5, Subject: Native Staff, Part II, 1946.

<sup>240</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.3.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.



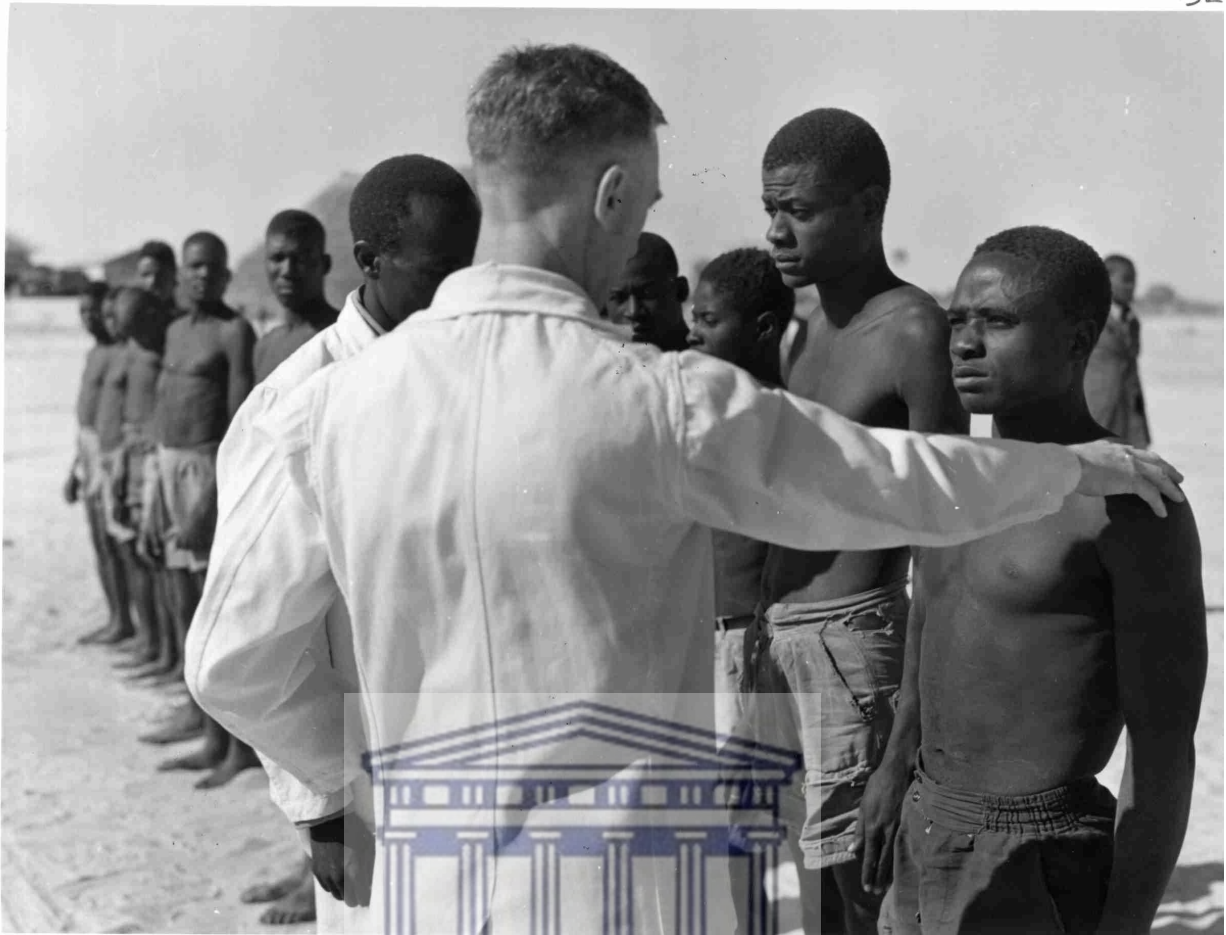


Figure 5: Recruiting labour, Ovamboland. Physical inspection of prospective workers. Ondangwa? 1953.

Remarks: Prospective workers lined up for physical and medical inspection by the white labour recruiter. Source of photo: National Archives Namibia, reference number: 03270.

Contract labourers state that there were numerous sites around the Ondangwa administrative centre where physical selection used to take place. Weyulu whose first contract was in 1941 recalls one *omutete* conducted south east of Omwandi gwaKamanya<sup>241</sup> where Hyper Woermanbrock is currently situated and which later shifted to near Ludwig Benjamin's mahangu field on the west side of the Government Station, where the OK Food Shop is at

<sup>241</sup> Omwandi gwaKamanya is an ebony tree where Kamanya the son of Boy Shifandune (who worked as an interpreter at government offices, Ondangwa) began to repair cars, after branching out from his father's auto mechanic business.

present located.<sup>242</sup> Kashindi, Kamweethako and Shile during their contracts, sometimes joined *omutete* close to the former TransNamib office locally known as *ongushe*,<sup>243</sup> now sited to the immediate north of the Metropolitan –SWABOU institution. Hileni Ipinge, born in 1928, acknowledges having witnessed *omutete* taking place south of Ondjondjo shop<sup>244</sup> where currently the Ondangwa Open Market is placed. She says she observed it during a visit to her relative Nekulu IyaMvula’s homestead situated south of Ondjondjo store.<sup>245</sup> All former labourers’ interviewed acknowledge having boarded and been dropped off by lorries and later buses at Ondjondjo when leaving for the south and returning from the Police Zone.<sup>246</sup>

The migrant labour community referred to African staff in the recruitment structure as foremen (*oofolomana*), regardless of their responsibilities. Some of them worked as translators (*ootolokela*) (see Figure 6 below).



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<sup>242</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015. Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama. He says he used to be housed in Neputa’s house at Omwandi area when awaiting to be recruited.

<sup>243</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>244</sup> NAO, Annual Report, January – March 1950.

<sup>245</sup> Interview with Hileni Ipinge, 06.01.2013, Etambo, Ondonga.

<sup>246</sup> NAO, Annual Report January – March 1950. Unfortunately, no older city plans for Ondangwa were easily available to this research project that would mark out this infrastructure geared towards labour migration.



Figure 6: Colonial official with *folomana* translating to attested recruits at Ondangwa, Oshana Region, Ovamboland, Namibia, September 1954. Source of image: Dr. Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo Collection, University of Johannesburg Digitised Archive.<sup>247</sup>

Information says the busiest supervisors ever were those who were in charge of the initial physical selection at the site,<sup>248</sup> as they used to deal with chaos, when probable recruits used to push forward at the same time hoping to be picked when vacant posts from well-paying

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<sup>247</sup> Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo was an ethnologist in the Native Affairs Department from 1930 – 1969. He served in both the South African government and South West Africa colonial administration. While in SWA he took a trip to Ovamboland around September 1954 where he took several photographs in the region, some of which I have used in this thesis. For more information on van Warmelo background, see S. Pugach. ‘Carl Meinhof and the German influence on van Warmelo’s ethnological and linguist writing, 1927-1935’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, (30), 4. 2004 and G. Miescher and D. Henrichsen (eds), *New Notes on Kaoko: The Northern Kunene Region* (Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2000), pp 190 – 193.

<sup>248</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

sectors were announced. Muleka and David Silvanus argue that order could only be restored by beating potential recruits with palm stalks to make them move backwards and allow the process to resume.<sup>249</sup>

David Silvanus remembers some of the foremen such as Johannes Shihepo from Akweenyaga, Titus Nailonga and Johannes Angombe whom the migrant labour community nicknamed *Thondolo* (as he liked advising leaving recruits to avoid overstaying (*yaa ha ka thondole*), but to return home after completion of their contracts). Silvanus says these supervisors used to address departing recruits, cautioning them to go obey their masters, work hard and return home to improve their economic situation.<sup>250</sup> Frans Weyulu recalls an oshiKwanyama-speaking man by the surname Shipena, widely known in migrant labour community as Haikukwafa, which literally means ‘I would help you’. He worked as an assistant to the medical doctor at the examination centre, and he earned himself such a name because he liked citing the phrase *ohai ku kwafa* (I would help you), when (out of naughtiness) thrashing the rejected prospective recruits with palm stalks.<sup>251</sup>

The issue of recruits mistreated at the hands of recruiting officials was also observed in Maseru, Lesotho, Southern Africa, when migrant workers there were insulted and kicked around like dogs. Moodie and Ndatshe describe the arrival at the Welkom mine in South Africa, when recruits went through medical examination and were again ‘stripped naked and run in droves,’ being kicked and pushed to the doctor after being doused with bitterly cold water.<sup>252</sup> Namibian contract labourers relate that there were *aambwela*,<sup>253</sup> a migrant

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<sup>249</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga and interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>250</sup> Interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013. Onambango, Ondonga and interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>251</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2 / V4, Labour Recruiting 1920-1941; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

<sup>252</sup> Moodie and Ndatshe, *Going for Gold, Men, Mines and Migration*, pp 12-13.

<sup>253</sup> According to Hileni Ipinge in an interview on 06.1.2013, Etambo, Ondonga, the term *aambwela* is a plural noun which Oshiwambo-speaking people use when referring to folks from other African countries. Aawambo

community comprised of foremen and potential recruits from Angola. Amongst the foremen were Boy Shifandume,<sup>254</sup> Lumingu, Langman<sup>255</sup> locally known as *Langumana*, Shuushe omuKambida<sup>256</sup> and Kangoma.<sup>257</sup> The latter who worked as a foreman at *omutete* was well known for shouting and screaming the criteria that potential recruits were expected to meet. He used to call out that men with big and strong legs *omipindi deembao*, broader chests *neembadjwa da andjuka* and with wisdom teeth were the only ones that could qualify for recruitment and those with legs similar to those of the *luntsentse* (Crowned Plover, *Stephanibyx coronatus*) birds would not be picked.<sup>258</sup> To make viewing easy, prospective recruits wore short pants while those in long trousers had them rolled up, with bare chests, and they all stood in queues for the white Medical Examiner to finalize the physical selection (see Figure 7 below).




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called those people as such because they were from distant and unfamiliar places, spoke different languages, and their customs and norms were different from that of the Aawambo. She explains further that the term *aambwela* is derived from the concept *eembwela*, which Ipinge states that is linked to the Aawambo ancient proverb *panda kola, mbiimbili oha i keembwela*. The saying cautions one to build trust with the person who is always around, rather than investing confidence in somebody who shows up for a short time and disappears to farther places for a long time. In the migrant labour context, the term was used when denoting foremen and potential recruits from Angola.

<sup>254</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 20, 11/1, Quarterly & Annual Reports, 1944, Vol.17, the quarterly report of January to March, 1944, states that Boy Shifandume (an interpreter for the government) interpreted a document (signed at Namungundo on 18 January 1938) which clarified how the government accessed Ondonga Trading and Okamwandi Residential sites. NAO, 3, File number 1/5, Subject: Native Staff, Part II, 1946.

<sup>255</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V2, Annual Report, March 1929.

<sup>256</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

<sup>257</sup> Interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga and interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama. The two say the migrant worker Kangoma was named as such because of his short height.

<sup>258</sup> Interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga.



Figure 7: Recruiting Labour, Ovamboland. Physical inspection of prospective workers. Ondangwa? 1953.

Remarks: Prospective workers lined up for physical and medical inspection by the white labour recruiter. The colonial official examining in a man's mouth, while *folomana* looking on. Source of photo: National Archives of Namibia, reference number: 24574.

In an unrecorded conversations with Andreas Kasamane (whose first contract was in 1940) and Junias Ndakola (in 1947), I learnt that the main criterion used to pick potential recruits employed in industries like kitchens and the hospitality industry<sup>259</sup> was that one had to look presentable (*e na ondjelo*)<sup>260</sup> or smart (*a nuka po*).<sup>261</sup> Contract labourers interviewed tell that

<sup>259</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukuambi and unrecorded interview with Andreas Kasamane, 24.12.2012, Eheke, Ondonga.

<sup>260</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukuambi.

<sup>261</sup> Unrecorded interview with Andreas Kasamane, 24.12.2012, Eheke, Ondonga.

the lucky probable recruits could be picked on the first day or week, but some waited for a month or more before they were selected. Such situations forced the lucky prospective recruits to assist friends or relatives to be recruited or find good positions they yearned for, but for which they could not qualify. Frans Weyulu admits having gone through the entire recruitment procedure that made his brother-in-law Josef Mateus from Ohadiwa yaKashipulwa kaEkandjo, Uukwanyama, to be successfully recruited in category C. He says several times medical doctors had been turning Mateus away, concluding that a big reddish birthmark (*oshifeka*) on his left cheek was a scar, that might have resulted from a disease from which he suffered.<sup>262</sup>

In another case, eighty-nine years of age Leonard Shile (who physically belonged to C category) discloses that in 1945, his elder brother Tshikomba Shile successfully managed to get him employed on the A grade at Consolidated Diamond Mines, where he worked up to retirement.<sup>263</sup> Similar irregularities appear in the correspondence of Major Hahn with R. S. Cope (the recruiting agent) that Jason Thomas and Alfeus Elago gave their places to Joseph Elago and Jopo Thomas to go work at Luderitz,<sup>264</sup> and when it was detected the two were called back to Ovamboland and punished.<sup>265</sup>

From interviews, I learnt that probable recruits were not the only one involved in favouring others, the administration and some foremen had also been arranging job positions for friends and relatives.<sup>266</sup> Shile concludes that preferential treatment made for instance prospective

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<sup>262</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938; interview Frans Weyulu 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

<sup>263</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>264</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruiting 1920 – 1941; in an interview 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi, Oscar Kamati says he witnessed several cases of such a nature.

<sup>265</sup> In NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruiting 1920 – 1941.

<sup>266</sup> In NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933 – 1937; NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937 – 1938. The latter file reveals that another kindness was shown by the Native Commissioner towards Angola nationals when he persuaded the Chamber of Mines to take into employment the Angolan nationals whom the company used to complain were of poor physique. The NC assured the company that some of the Angola citizens had registered themselves under Tribal Trust Funds, settled and became subjects of Aawambo tribes;

recruits who knew nobody in the recruitment structure employ numerous misdeeds to assist others. Shile recounts that during one of his contracts (he could not remember the year), a white labour recruiter used to mark on prospective recruits' chests with black and red ink pens to indicate to officials at the medical examination centre that it was him who selected them. He says that one Oshikwambi-speaking man (probably a returned labourer) brought similar pens to the recruitment centre which were then used in marking C letters on chests of as many Oshikwambi-speaking probable recruits as possible.<sup>267</sup> After selection was finalized, probable recruits were then ordered to sprint one and quarter miles from Ondjondjo (situated southeast of the Government Station),<sup>268</sup> while in Kavango they were made to strip and run around the wall surrounded by reeds.<sup>269</sup> Interviewees state that running in this labour recruitment system was arranged to provoke the respiratory system for the medical doctor to get accurate readings.<sup>270</sup>

Situations that used to cause the recruitment process to halt, like disease outbreaks,<sup>271</sup> or absence of recruiting staff,<sup>272</sup> used to be orally announced by foremen at *omutete*<sup>273</sup> and spread within as well as outside of the labour community. An example of the latter is noted on the song (*oshiimbo*)<sup>274</sup> about migrant labour recess by Aakwambi men,<sup>275</sup> which the

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therefore they could be now accepted as suitable labourers. My own question is whether registration, or being accepted in a certain community, qualifies a person to become a physically suitable labourer?

<sup>267</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937. Leonard Shile in an interview held on 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi also mentions the irregularities in which the Kwambi-speaking prospective recruits engaged.

<sup>268</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 17/1, Ondonga Trading Co. LTD file, 1942 now SWANLA Store; Native Affairs Ovamboland, 20, 11/1, Quarterly & Annual Reports, 1944, Vol. 17.

<sup>269</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 93.

<sup>270</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yilithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga and interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>271</sup> NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V5, Annual Report, February 1932; NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report, 1925.

<sup>272</sup> NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V9, Annual Report November and December 1936.

<sup>273</sup> Interview with Oscar Uupindi and Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu.

<sup>274</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 231.

<sup>275</sup> Unrecorded telephonic conversation with Amutenya Malakia, 08.09.2018, oNangombe tiikandwa, Uukwambi.



Namibian Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) Radio Oshiwambo Service used to air. Since my research topic is about migrant labour, I inquired to find out how this part of the song come into existence. Thus, I thread it into this study.

Part of the song verse goes:

*Aambandja shuneni neempunda dheni (X2)*

*Ne mu ye metine ndi mwa lombwelwa (X2)*

*Aanakaholo ye ya taa zi kOndangua (X2)*

*Oya yi le oyendji yamwe yu upa ko (X2)*

*Megumbo na mu gwedhwe eengombe mbali (X2),*

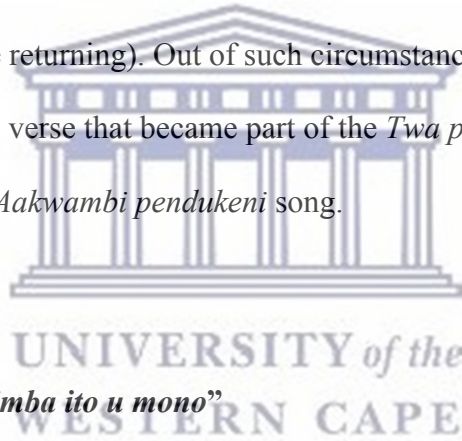
*Aambandja ye ye ya lye omashini (X2).<sup>276</sup>*

Former contract labourers from Uukwambi that I interviewed say that they remember the song section well, but they say that they have no idea how this part of the song came into being. Amutenya Malakia<sup>277</sup> explains that in Onepungu (between Elim, Uukwangula and oNangombe tiikandwa) wards in Uukwambi kingdom there was a homestead for Amunyela

<sup>276</sup> Literally, the first four lines of this stanza are talking about the contract labour system in which a number of prospective recruits from the Ovambo kingdoms and neighbouring Angola tramped to Ondangua for recruitment. Some succeeded, and some were turned away. It also relates that, during recess, prospective recruits (with insufficient food) were forced to go back home and return when recruitment resumed. The verse's last two lines suggest increasing the number of milking cows to provide more milk to feed not only family members, but strangers too. That shows a sense of Aawambo community in relation to others. Amutenya Malakia, 08.09.2018, oNangombe tiikandwa, Uukwambi, is the one who provided the verse of the song above by means of an unrecorded telephone conversation.

<sup>277</sup> Amutenya Malakia is from Onangombe tiikandwa, Uukwambi. He currently leads a popular cultural group (comprised of men only) called Iita yaKadha that he took over after Eliakim Uutoni (known as Iita yaKadha) passed away in 2013. Secilia Ngaike Imalwa from Onamula – Okamwandi, Uukwambi introduced me to Malakia whom I telephonically interviewed on 8 September 2018 about how such a song came into being. Malakia said it was the kings' tradition to invite their communities mostly men to the royal court to execute various activities including agricultural *taa ka longa iimpungu kuuwa* and so forth, sometimes men were also called for the marula (*omaongo*) festival. He said that when men had enough to drink, they used to end up singing praising songs *oontanto* or *iihimbo*, which referenced different experiences. Malakia confirmed that some of the verses of the *Twa pendulwa kokadhila okashona, oKantene a ka ti Aakwambi pendukeni* song are about cattle raiding excursions that Aakwambi men undertook to a neighbouring kingdom, and that men ensured owners of the cattle they raided never came for them. Another verse of the song was contributed from Amunyela's experience with potential recruits who crossed through the Uukwambi kingdom to and from Ondangua. Malakia said that NBC Oshiwambo Radio airs various songs that it audio recorded in the past from the different kingdoms.

gwaTshikongo. His homestead was known for offering services to the prospective recruits from the western Ovambo kingdoms, Mbangala and Ombandja who tramped passing to or from Ondangua. Such services included probable recruits from Ongandjera, Uukualuudhi and Uukolonkadhi collecting palm stalks there to carry their belongings to Ondangua, as palm trees were hardly found in their own areas. They also used to be served meals, including soft mahangu meal and milk called *oshipilili shomashini* (during the milking season). The story goes that one afternoon a group of hungry prospective recruits returning home on break from Ondangwa (many of them oshiMbandja speaking) entered Amunyela's house, hoping to be served their meal as usual, but to their disappointment, that day the Amunyela household ran out of milk. To calm them down, he promised that they would be served their meal on Thursday (the day they were returning). Out of such circumstances, Malakia retells that Amunyela fixed the *okaholo* verse that became part of the *Twa pendulwa kokadhila okashona, oKantene a ka ti Aakwambi pendukeni* song.



***“Ngee nge ito lidula noushimba ito u mono”***



Figure 8: Humiliating process in which potential recruits medically inspected by a colonial official at Ondangwa, (undated). Source of photo: MuseumAfrica Collection, Johannesburg. Courtesy: Richard Pakklepa.

“During medical inspection, potential recruits never hesitated to strip off, as they yearned to go work and earn money.”<sup>278</sup> Such was Andreas Muleka’s expression as he told of his medical examination experience. A white medical doctor carried out the medical examination using the power conferred on him by the colonial administration<sup>279</sup> and assisted by a black man who worked as an interpreter.<sup>280</sup> The examination was performed on potential recruits going south to work as well as those who were going to be working for the government at Ondangwa. The inspection was done in groups in a kind of a hall, which according to Andreas Kasamane was constructed in 1932.<sup>281</sup> The prime motive for the checkup was to

<sup>278</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga. He argues further that working south was the only source of cash, with which labourers’ could improve their lives and that of their families.

<sup>279</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Native Affairs, Annual Report, for the year 1925; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17.

<sup>280</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 3 File number 1/5, subject: Native Staff, Part II, 1946.

<sup>281</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga. In an unrecorded interview held on 24.12.2012 at Eheke, Ondonga, Andreas Kasamane (born in 1922, Emono in Onayena Constituency) in 1932 came to live with Uukanga Amutenja and Nangula dhaAlukaku (his grandparents from his mother side) in proximity of the Ondangwa Government Station (a few meters southwest of where gwaShamba mall is now situated). He says potential recruits used to be medically

filter healthy recruits from unhealthy ones who were turned away for several reasons.<sup>282</sup> The following figures come from a Public Health Report of 1935, which stated the causes and number of potential recruits rejected: for poor physique 167, too old 69, too young 43, bad eyesight 48, herniae (ruptures) 45, scars 31, deformities 25, varicose veins 23, syphilis 8, weak chest 2, sores 1, and 1 deaf. In another case, an Ovambo Extra-Territorial subject by the name Dumingo, T.P. was also rejected as unfit for work, because of a stiff back.<sup>283</sup>

The way most of former contract labourers describe medical examinations they undertook shows that they had little knowledge about the examination essentially.<sup>284</sup> They state that they were never informed why their mouths, eyes, ears and heartbeat were checked.<sup>285</sup> They also say they did not know why they had to go nude,<sup>286</sup> their anus checked (*ya mbulunganyekwa*)<sup>287</sup> and penis squeezed (*taa kandwa kuulumentu*),<sup>288</sup> the latter I think was conducted to check the probability of sexually infectious diseases.<sup>289</sup>

Out of despair, the rejected presented themselves one, two, three or more times for re-examination within a short period of being rejected. This situation forced the Administrator in

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examined in the open until the medical examination hall was constructed in 1932. He says in the same year, he also witnessed the landing of the plane at Onantsi water pan (*ekango lyaNantsi* situated close to his grandparents' house) that collected King Ipumbu yaShilongo from Uukwambi. See the account of King Ipumbu Shilongo's arrest in the Report of the Administrator of South West Africa, 1932, pp 52-57.

<sup>282</sup> Hayes, 'A History of the Ovambo of Namibia', p 282; interviews with Oscar Uupindi, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu.

<sup>283</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 6, 2/1, Labour Recruiting Etc., Part VII, 1945, see correspondence of 6<sup>th</sup> May 1946 and of 1<sup>st</sup> December 1945; Union of South Africa, Report of the Administrator of South-West Africa 1935, p 53; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17.

<sup>284</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes', p 213.

<sup>285</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi. I argue that the checking in the potential recruits' mouths was not really to see if they had wisdom teeth but to check for possibilities of mouth sores.

<sup>286</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2018, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.

<sup>287</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga and interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

<sup>288</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 213.

<sup>289</sup> Union of South Africa, Report of the Administration of South-West Africa 1924, p 86; NANFNAO, 5, 2/IV4, Labour Recruiting 1920-1941; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama. In an interview with Leevi Namwiha, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga, he confirms that sexually transmitted infections were among the diseases for which potential recruits were medically examined at Ondangwa.

Windhoek on 3 November 1945 to pass an instruction to SWANLA representatives at Ondangua to inform those rejected in the first instance to go home and return only when they were fit to pass the medical tests.<sup>290</sup> Contract labourers said that the said directive was ignored, as those turned away tended to hang around, waiting for potential recruits (family members or friends) to assist them to be recruited.<sup>291</sup> The circumstance of helping out others was confirmed by Mr. Kelly who issued the labour and traveling passes. Kelley argued that he noted some unusual conduct amongst certain successful recruits who were issued *okaholo* but hesitated to collect passes from the traveling office and some who received labour traveling passes, but avoided to board the bus at “SWANLA” offices. He suspected that those who behaved in such manner were those assisted others to be recruited, thus they could not board the bus.<sup>292</sup>

Of course, the rejected recruits whom others assisted with recruitment contributed to the accusation against the District Surgeon’s office that it had been passing the sick and weak recruits.<sup>293</sup> The DS’s office denied the said accusation and it made the Chief Native Commissioner in Windhoek (through the Secretary for SWANLA) issue a request to the District Surgeon at Grootfontein to re-examine all labour recruits from Ovamboland for a period of six months.<sup>294</sup> The re-inspection was conducted from 1942-1944 and during its implementation the following were found unfit to work: Mvula Inane, T. P. diagnosed with chronic conjunctivitis, while Shapopi Haimbile was detected with valvular disease of the heart. The two were sent back to Ondangwa in Ovamboland by bus.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 6, 2/1, Labour Recruiting etc., Part VII, 1945.

<sup>291</sup> Interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>292</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, Annual Report, February – March 1925; NAO, Annual Reports 1947 – 1953.

<sup>293</sup> NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour Recruiting etc., Vol. 2, 1924-1929.

<sup>294</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5 Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid.

It seems that older potential recruits and *picannins* (young ones)<sup>296</sup> were examined together,<sup>297</sup> something that former contract labourers complained was a violation of the conception of seniority.<sup>298</sup> Such young recruits were only issued to approved employers<sup>299</sup> who through written application, had requested the Native Affairs Office in Windhoek that they wanted *picannins* in their employment as they were very useful, acquiring skills at an early age in comparison to raw grown-up natives proceeding to work for the first time.<sup>300</sup>

Contract labour records state that there had been only one DS (medical doctor acting as District Surgeon) in the entire Ovamboland, whose primary responsibility was to oversee district residents' health,<sup>301</sup> supervise mission hospitals,<sup>302</sup> as well as perform medical examinations on thousands of potential recruits on a daily if not weekly basis.<sup>303</sup> The DS also attended to urgent recruitment matters within a given short period.<sup>304</sup> Regardless of this considerable workload, the DS's work received criticism from both outsiders and insiders of the labour community, especially for the way the medical examination was conducted<sup>305</sup> that was dehumanizing and lacked privacy.<sup>306</sup> The same office was accused by labour-related offices that it was doing a sub-standard job such as passing medically unfit recruits and allowing irregularities.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> *Picannins* were young males aged twelve to sixteen years employed to work in farms (mostly in the kitchen).

<sup>297</sup> In NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour Recruiting etc., Vol. 2, 1924 -1929; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, on 30 December 1938.

<sup>298</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 213.

<sup>299</sup> NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour recruiting etc., Vol. 2, 1924-1929.

<sup>300</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, Native Labour No. 2/1918, miscellaneous correspondence.

<sup>301</sup> NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V5, Annual and Monthly report: February 1932; Native Affairs Ovamboland, 6, 2/1, Labour Recruiting Etc., Part VII, 1945.

<sup>302</sup> NAO, Annual Report, January to March, September 1948.

<sup>303</sup> NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V4, Monthly report: January 1931.

<sup>304</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941.

<sup>305</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 20, 11/1, Annual reports, January - March 1943.

<sup>306</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes', p 213; Butchart, *The industrial Panopticon: mining and medical construction*, p 192.

<sup>307</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruiting 1920 - 1941.

Many criticisms and condemnations of the medical inspections made me wonder how humanely an institution back in that time with similar challenges in human resources and physical facilities like those of the South African administration, could have individually attended to the overwhelming number of potential recruits during medical examinations? What approach could such an institution have employed to perform medical examinations differently from the way the colonial administration did it in Ovamboland?

Boas Mweendeleli and Oscar Kamati say that successful recruits, after being issued with traveling passes, returned to Johannes Shihepo's office to indicate when they were departing south.<sup>308</sup> When there was a disease outbreak, the colonial administration ensured every leaving recruit was inoculated.<sup>309</sup> It is again said that those with skin flakes on their bodies were greased, their hair, clothes and belongings such as blankets were disinfected with DDT<sup>310</sup> (*taa pombelwa noDD*)<sup>311</sup> to prevent the spread of fleas south.<sup>312</sup> It is confirmed that sometimes when there was foot and mouth outbreak in the region, recruits proceeding south had their hands and feet and footwear disinfected,<sup>313</sup> first at Ondangua and later in Tsumeb.<sup>314</sup> Still on hygiene matters, Jonas Kadhila Martin shared with Vilho Shigwedha what he describes as a horrible cleansing experience, when he and others at Namutoni were made to bathe in a pool filled with insecticide.<sup>315</sup> Such disinfection practices of the labourers were also practiced in Kavango, where Likuwa argues that successful recruits were cleansed of

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<sup>308</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, on 06.03.2016; 06.02.2017. Omuhosi, Ondonga.

<sup>309</sup> NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V7, Annual Report June - July 1935; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Annual Reports, 1945.

<sup>310</sup> DDT (dichlorodiphenyltrichloroetha) is a pesticide which was widely used in 1940s and 1950s. It was later found to be dangerous and now restrictions are placed on its use.

<sup>311</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

<sup>312</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 48.

<sup>313</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3, Enquiries complaints General Part II, 1930-1933/4.

<sup>314</sup> NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V7, Annual reports: January 1934; NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

<sup>315</sup> Shigwedha 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 213; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

diseases by plunging their feet into D. P. (medicine bowl), of course to obviate the spreading of diseases to the Police Zone.<sup>316</sup>

### **How the migrant community publicly accepted recruitment procedures**

Having learnt about medical examination criticism and condemnations,<sup>317</sup> I asked former contract labourers to explain their position with regard to how they openly accepted recruitment methods and made it part of their lives. All interviewees admit that they already had heard about the recruitment procedures including the medical inspection, before they underwent it. Leonard Shile, Oscar Kamati and Leevi Namwiha say it was only through the contract labour system that modern goods (yearned for by many) could be accessed, thus that made them lightheartedly make the medical inspection process part of their lives.<sup>318</sup>

Vendelinus Kashindi, Daniel Shooya and Isak Shaanika report that a sturdy desire to work and return to improve the economic privations back home, forced them to helplessly present themselves (*yi igandja*) to be examined.<sup>319</sup> Israel Shingenge, Frans Weyulu and Titus Kamweethako say the state of destitution (*oluhepo*) which their families and relatives were experiencing, made them easily strip off before a medical doctor to be inspected.<sup>320</sup> Jeremia Shikongo, Bathoromeus Amulungu and Jakob Shatipamba argue that for as long as all prospective recruits during medical inspection were treated the same, that left no room for

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<sup>316</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 89. For further references on the sanitation syndrome see Maynard W. Swanson, 'The Sanitation Syndrome: Bubonic Plague and Urban Native Policy in the Cape Colony, 1900-1909,' *Journal of African History*, Vol. 18, No, 3 (1977), pp 387-410.

<sup>317</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 213.

<sup>318</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile and Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.8.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

<sup>319</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi and interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera.

<sup>320</sup> Interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama.



complaints.<sup>321</sup> The colonial economy that the northern societies including Aawambo were incorporated into by the colonial state, which controlled it through indirect rule, implicitly forced potential recruits to sacrifice their agency and widely accept the recruitment procedure.<sup>322</sup>

### ***Okaholo? What did it signify?***

According to Hayes, by 1918 the colonial administration proposed the usage of metal disks *odalate* (wire) as a new system of identification in the labour system, rather than paper ID.<sup>323</sup> I think what Hayes referred to as wire (s), are metal or tin discs, which the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs, Ondonga, Ovamboland requested to be issued to his office by the Office of the Secretary for SWA, Windhoek on 12 November 1924 together with, 2,500 lead seals and 12 balls of strong thin twine to tie the seals around labourers' arms or necks. Labour recruiting files for 1924-1929 confirm that the consignment was supplied by the Luderitz Chamber of Mines through the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs, Tsumeb. According to former contract labourers, the image below is of that referred to as *okaholo*, worn by mineworkers.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>321</sup> Interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalantu and interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama.

<sup>322</sup> Interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi and interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama. For a detailed discussion of the origins of the contract labour system in Namibia, see Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy', pp 107-111, 145.

<sup>323</sup> Hayes, 'A History of the Ovambo of Namibia', p 281. A related mode was also used by the state in South Africa, see Keith Breckenridge, 'The Book of Life: The South African Population Register and the Invention of Racial Descent, 1950-1980', *Kronos* 40, pp 225-240.

<sup>324</sup> NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour Recruiting etc., 1924-1929; RCO, No. 2/1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence & Native Labour file states that from 1918-1930s.

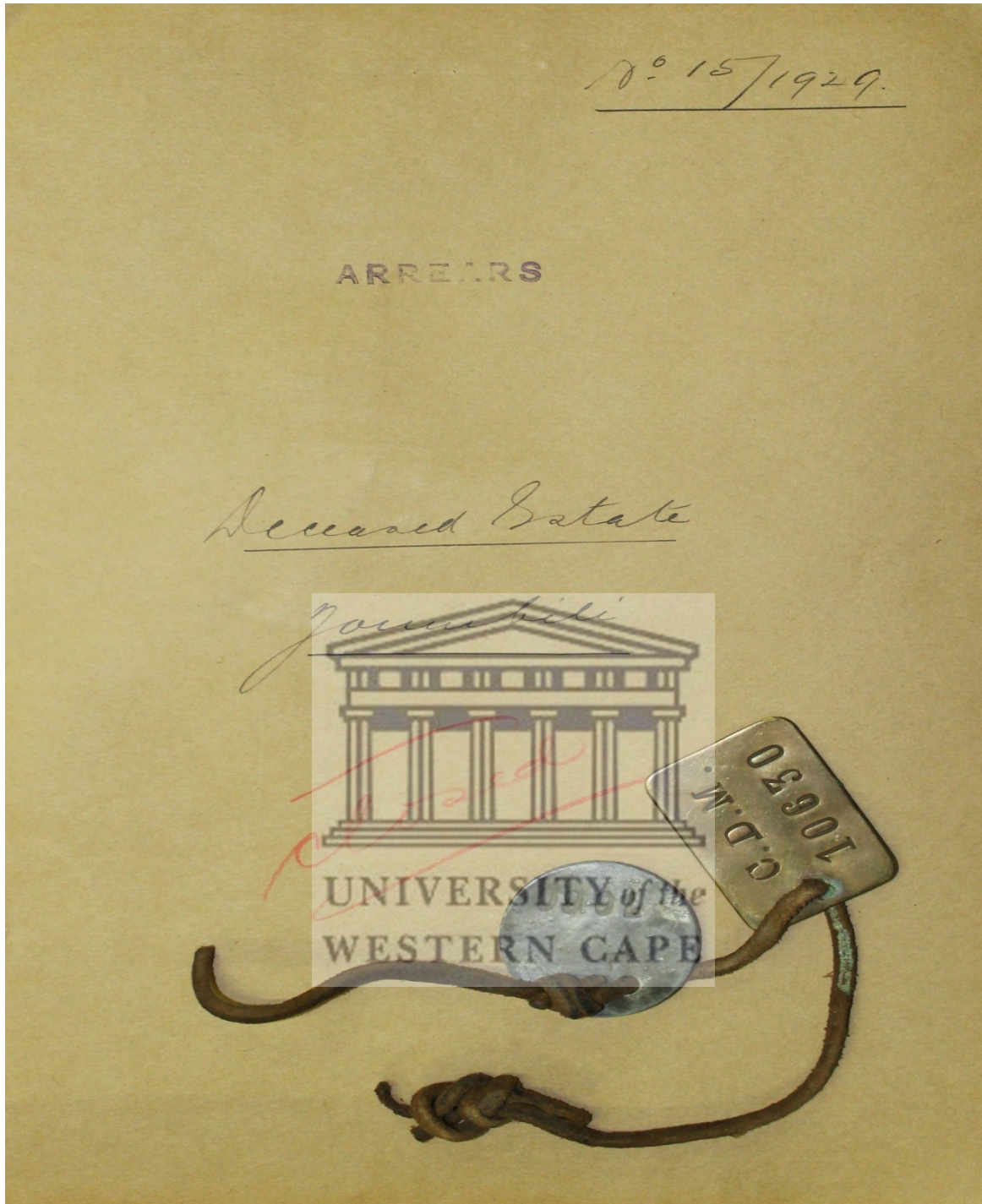


Figure 9: Estate file of Tshombiri (Jombili) Amutenya yaKanipembe. Wristband for contract worker's identification number found in the National Archives of Namibia. Reference number: NAW [47] Estates 1929, No. 15/1929 (photograph by Werner Hillebrecht, 2014).

Leonard Shile who worked for Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM) from 1945 and Vendelinus Kashindi who says he worked (the year he could not remember) in a mine in

Johannesburg (Joini), South Africa, narrate that recruits were issued numbers upon arrival at workplaces worn round their wrists, and which they were identified with during their stay at mines.<sup>325</sup> Kashindi again argues that numbers were also used in roll-calls when there was a mine accident, to check survivors and those who might have died in the accident.<sup>326</sup>

Former contract workers say that those who passed the medical examination proceeded to the registration office where a lead seal *okaholo* (the most visible symbol of the migrant system) was placed to hang round their necks. Aawambo called such process *okuzala okaholo*.<sup>327</sup>

Lead seals were kept on long enough to show in the community that they were successfully recruited.<sup>328</sup> *Okaholo* also served as a proof to the Police that recruits holding lead seals were entering the Police Zone with proper authority, and those found on the Tsumeb and Grootfontein routes without a proper pass or seal were arrested.<sup>329</sup> *Okaholo* also signified that a worker had become part of an industrial system, which determined the treatment he received, what he ate, where he lodged,<sup>330</sup> what job he executed, what he would die from (if death was to occur) and where he was to be buried.<sup>331</sup> It also signified that those who broke the contract, possibly owing to its harsh conditions, were punishable by law.<sup>332</sup>

On 8 November 1915, the Protectorate Native Affairs Department, Windhoek, wrote to the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs about Ovambo labourers to inform them that the administration had decided to adopt the German system of recovering the amount expended in recruitment, feeding and clothing natives from employers.<sup>333</sup> Clothing included the issuing

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<sup>325</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>326</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>327</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga and interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu.

<sup>328</sup> NANFNAO, 3, 2/1V1, Labour Recruiting etc., 1924-1929.

<sup>329</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938.

<sup>330</sup> Report of the Government of the Union of South Africa on South West Africa for the year 1924, pp 77-78.

<sup>331</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, pp 121-124.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid*, p 125.

<sup>333</sup> RCO, No. 2/1915, Miscellaneous Correspondence & Native Labour.

of blankets, shorts and trousers, which were supplied to recruits to be able to withstand the weather,<sup>334</sup> and because in some cases labourers were transported to work places dressed in tattered shorts and no shirts.<sup>335</sup> On 20 April 1940, the Native Commissioner of Ovamboland also wrote to update the Native Commissioner in Windhoek that blankets had been issued to recruits prior to their departure on the railway buses for Tsumeb.<sup>336</sup> This followed the Administrator's suggestion in Windhoek to the Secretaries of the Northern Labour Organization, Grootfontein and the Southern Labour Organization in Luderitz on 22 August 1940 that recruits awaiting transportation be handed blankets, as sometimes it used to be terribly cold.<sup>337</sup>

During their contracts, say Frans Weyulu and Andreas Muleka, there was a white staff member whom the Aawambo nicknamed Mbendeka,<sup>338</sup> though his real name was Frans Lobscher.<sup>339</sup> Mbendeka is a noun derived from the verb *okumbendeka* to give a present, in this context Lobscher had been handing out gifts, attracting customers to call again.

Mbendeka also used to distribute clothing (shorts and shirts) as well as blankets, collectively called *oombendeka*,<sup>340</sup> to the newly recruited migrant labourers shortly before their departure to the south.<sup>341</sup> These goods were not given freely, but were part of employment conditions and only supplied to recruits<sup>342</sup> who accepted the work, terms and conditions of the contract

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<sup>334</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

<sup>335</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes', p 211.

<sup>336</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour Recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>337</sup> NAO, 4, 2-1, Labour recruiting 1933-1937 (Vol. 2).

<sup>338</sup> Mweshida, 'Nicknames in Ovamboland', p 8.

<sup>339</sup> Frans Lobscher is remembered in connection with the SWANLA shop called Ondjondjo Wholesale situated in Ondangwa. As manager of the shop, he used to give presents to customers to encourage them to come and buy again, which is why Aawambo nicknamed him Mbendeka. Mweshida, 'Nicknames in Ovamboland', p 8.

<sup>340</sup> *Oombendeka* (plural) is derived from the verb *okumbendeka* meaning to give things free of charge. See also Shiweda, 'Omhedhi: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 119.

<sup>341</sup> Mweshida, 'Nicknames in Ovamboland', p 8; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama and interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

<sup>342</sup> NAO, 4, 2-1, Labour recruitment etc., 1933-1937 (Vol. 2); RCO, No 2/1915, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour. The latter states that the amount incurred in feeding and clothing the recruits was recovered by the colonial administration from employers, whom I believe deducted it from workers' wages.

by putting their thumbs in red ink and marking their thumbprint.<sup>343</sup> Recruits after they were done with all these arrangements, were then issued labour and traveling passes by Mr Kelly's office.<sup>344</sup>

The quality of items received was determined by the employing industry or sector.

Consolidated Diamond Mines ranked number one in supplying first class quality, as it provided blankets which lasted a couple of years, a shirt (made of cotton and wool) and khaki shorts (of inferior quality).<sup>345</sup> South Africa Railway & Harbour (SAR&H) rated number two as it provided one woollen blanket, one woollen shirt, one pair of underpants,<sup>346</sup> while Otavi Minen-und Eisenbahn-Gesellschaft (OMEG) employees and farm labourers were issued blankets and clothing of lesser quality.<sup>347</sup> O.M.E.G. handed out each labourer a blanket when leaving Ondangwa, then shirts, one pair of shorts and a pair of underpants when reaching Tsumeb. O.M.E.G. recruits proceeding to Kolmanskop received a second blanket, a jacket and a pair of goggles when they arrived there.<sup>348</sup> Muleka (whose first contract was in 1947) says that after marking their signatures on contract papers, they were transported to the SWANLA camp outside Grootfontein where a man called Shitondo checked if they were correctly graded. He says for instance those graded A category were made to lift heavy things and if they failed, they were given jobs in other sectors, a process of demotion Aawambo called *oku shendjwa*.<sup>349</sup> This account of job distribution is supported by Ndadi (whose first contract was in the same year as Muleka's) who argues that at Grootfontein, recruits were forced to accept any job given, and those who refused were brutally attacked by officials.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', p 83; Shiweda, 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy, p 123.

<sup>344</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

<sup>345</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruiting 1920-1941; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour Recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>346</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V2, Labour recruitment 1933-1937.

<sup>347</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour Recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid.

<sup>349</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

<sup>350</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 17-18 and interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

From 1945, there was a change regarding job allocation in the migrant labour system. Some employers put forth their request to have their previous workers back in their employment, regardless of the defects they suffered from.<sup>351</sup> In an interview, Vendelinus Kashindi (whose first contract was in 1939) recounted that he noticed an adjustment in the labour system during Commissioner (*komufala*) Nakale kEhomato's time.<sup>352</sup> Nakale kEhomato was the Oshiwambo nickname for Harold Eedes, the Native Commissioner for Ovamboland from January 1946 until 1954.<sup>353</sup> Kashindi tells the story of his half-brother Justus Kashindi who during Hahn's period had been turned away several times because one of his legs was longer than the other that made it challenging when walking. Because Justus longed to be recruited, he approached *folomana* Johannes Shihepo (from Akweenyanga ward near Onguediva), who employed him to work in his house and he only left when he found work as a kitchen worker in a farm in Outjo during Nakale's time.<sup>354</sup>

Kashindi's story links with Eedes' suggestion to reconsider for employment prospective recruits who were rejected for minor defects such as a cataracts (*onte*) in the eye, the loss of a toe or finger and so on, because he wanted to prevent them from tramping to the Rand (South Africa mines) and the Rhodesian tobacco fields.<sup>355</sup> Kashindi relates that those who used to be rejected during Hahn's time were mostly employed to work in farms and were known in the migrant labour community as *mbono oyosheendo shaNakale*, which literally means 'those of Nakale's period'.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> NAO, 6, 2/1, Labour Recruiting etc, Part VII, 1945.

<sup>352</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>353</sup> Mweshida, 'Nicknames in Ovamboland, p 7.

<sup>354</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>355</sup> NAO, Annual Reports, 1947-1953.

<sup>356</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

## Conclusion

This chapter elucidates that the South African colonial administration had two motives for instituting and making the medical examination infrastructure compulsory in the South West African contract labour system. Although the administration had an obligation of reporting to the League of Nations Permanent Mandates Commission each year about the health status of the 'native' subjects of the territory, it prioritized medical inspection for its own gain. An important factor in having labourers medically examined was to protect the health of the white population in the territory, including venereal diseases. This supports interlocutors' accounts when they argue that they had their mouths, reproductive parts and their anus checked during medical inspections. Of course, such examinations were conducted to find possibilities of symptoms of infectious diseases. The arrangements and mechanisms put in place around the labour system clearly indicate that the administration meant to significantly safeguard the health of white population, a purpose with which those who had been cheating the system by assisting others to get recruited had been interfering. Another commitment the administration had shown regarding health was when it introduced the re-examining of recruits upon arrival in Grootfontein further south (after detecting irregularities at Ondangwa).<sup>357</sup>

The relaxation of recruitment requirements which became part of changes and adjustment, noted in the contract labour system in the mid-1940s did not only benefit the administration, but also greatly profited many of those who were rejected owing to minor defects.<sup>358</sup> Though the adjusted arrangements took place, it is not clear if that was done because of the anomalies

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<sup>357</sup> Union of South Africa, Report of the Administration of South-West Africa 1924, p 86; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruiting 1920-1941; NANFNAO, 5, 2/V5, Labour Recruiting 1942-1944; Butchart, 'The Industrial Panopticon: Mining and the Medical Construction', pp 185, 187-188, 191-192; A. Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', pp 28-32; Wallace, *Health, Power and Politics*, pp 225-227, 235, 238, 244; Wallace, *A history of Namibia*, pp 154, 210, 234, 236; Shiweda, 'Omhedi: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 106; Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango', pp 83, 89, 93 and Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 17.

<sup>358</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5 Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

that some of the migrant labour community members had been putting the administration through or because there was a need of labourers in the industry.<sup>359</sup> Finally, in this chapter, I explore what the contract workers and their community at large say about benefiting from the labour system, when they embraced blankets and modes of Western dress, the items they eventually adopted and made part of their culture.



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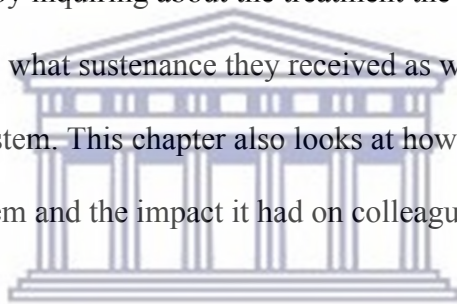
<sup>359</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruitment 1920-1941; NAO, Annual Reports 1947 – 1953.



## CHAPTER 4

### LODGING, RATIONS, SANITATION AND INDUSTRIAL MORTALITY

Much written about contract labour claims that the system was repressive, exploitative, brutal and required both daring and risk.<sup>360</sup> Previous chapters of this thesis also suggest that the labour system disrupted cultural norms, because seniority was never considered during medical inspection and recruits and labourers were ill-treated throughout their voyages.<sup>361</sup> Having heard about migrant labour only from a negative side, I decided to seek out the positive parts of the system by inquiring about the treatment the labourers received with regard to where they lodged, what sustenance they received as well as the sanitation conditions offered by the system. This chapter also looks at how the death of labourers was dealt with in the labour system and the impact it had on colleagues as well as on family back in the sending area.



To have ready recruits in one place, the colonial administration in collaboration with Luderitzbucht Chamber of Mines constructed a shed using timber and corrugated iron at Ondangwa around 1940, to house recruits awaiting transport to Tsumeb. The 80 by 26 metre shed later became a shelter to both recruits and those who came long distances to Ondangwa for recruitment and could not secure lodging in homesteads around Ondangwa.<sup>362</sup> The

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<sup>360</sup> See Shiweda, 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 105; Shigwedha, Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 208; NANFNAO, 7, 2/1/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Labourer Commission Ovamboland) – Returning labourer complaints; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944; Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line*, p 190; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 18.

<sup>361</sup> See NANFNAO, 7, 2/1/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Labourer Commission Ovamboland) – Returning labourer complaints; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944; Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line*, p 190; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 18.

<sup>362</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944 and interview with Jacob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama.

colonial administration called such housing the recruiting camp, while the migrant labour community referred to it as the waiting *pondok*.<sup>363</sup>

Because numbers of men waited for months at Ondangua before they were recruited, food that they brought from home used to run out.<sup>364</sup> Such problems in the 1940s made the District Surgeon's office pass on its concern to the Native Commissioner's office that it was finding it difficult to get adequate numbers of category A recruits due to underfeeding. This forced SWANLA in collaboration with the administration to start feeding recruits that were rejected because of malnourishment.<sup>365</sup> The underweight recruits waiting for transport south were supplied with unstamped millet (*mahangu*), but many beneficiaries waiting for vehicles complained that they had problems cooking it, as they were unsure when the bus would collect them.<sup>366</sup>

The Native Commissioner discouraged recruits going to work on farms and mines to be fed on mahangu and recommended that they should be "properly fed" for some time before commencing work, as they would be undertaking hard labour.<sup>367</sup> Based on the Commissioner's argument, though it is not specified here, it suggests that there was a diet hierarchy. The choice of food had a positive impact on the local economy, as the mahangu that fed waiting recruits brought cash into the pockets of local farmers around Ondangua. Mahangu was transported to the administrative centre in the lorry of Mr. Verfeld of Omafo (first name unknown). However, archival documents provide no details about the cost of grain, which was the unit of measurement used when trading, and whether Verfeld's truck was the only one hired to transport supplies and if so, why only him? In that same year

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<sup>363</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 48. *Pondok* was the concept widely used by contract labourers when referring to accommodation or housing in migrant labour system.

<sup>364</sup> On the food referred to here see Chapter 1 of this thesis.

<sup>365</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944; NAO, Annual Reports, January – March 1943.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

(1940) administration had a plan to collect considerable quantities of the grain from “Runtu” (present-day Rundu), Okavango, should they experience shortage in Ovamboland.<sup>368</sup> All feeding costs expended on recruits was recovered from employers.<sup>369</sup>

Since the early 1920s, when the Union administration took over control of the labour system, it never made water or sanitation provision for the migrant labour community, and those who lodged at the *pondok* at Ondangwa had to find their own way to access such facilities.

Amongst former contract workers I interviewed,<sup>370</sup> Leonard Shile and Frans Weyulu confirmed the absence of ablution facilities at Ondangwa. They ratify further that prospective recruits coming from wooded former kingdoms, where they relieved themselves when nature called, encountered difficulties at Ondangwa, because that area only had scattered palm and/or bitter bushes here and there. The issue of no lavatories or forest around the centre made the migrant labour community come up with a saying - *mOndonga kamu niwe shoni / honi* – literally informing newcomers to be at ease to use the open space as a toilet.<sup>371</sup>

In mid-1940, a transit camp for contract labourers was built at Namutoni. Africans were housed in inadequate and unsafe accommodation, in an unfenced shed close to the forest where lions were present.<sup>372</sup> However, at least at the transit camp there was water and

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<sup>368</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>369</sup> RCO, No. 2/1915, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour.

<sup>370</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Petrus Kalola, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sem Ekandjo, 06.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera; interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera; interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama and unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>371</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama. There is a detailed literature by Colin McFarlane and Jonathan Silver in ‘The Poolitical City “Seeing Sanitation” and Making the Urban Political in Cape Town’, *Antipode* Vol. 49, No. 1, 2017, 2016, pp 137-139.

<sup>372</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 31; Miescher, *Namibia's Red Line*, p 190. For more information on the development and role of Namutoni, see Miescher, p 191.

sanitation infrastructure, with latrines for the Africans and a rest room for Europeans.<sup>373</sup>

Migrants were served a plain maize meal porridge<sup>374</sup> and they could drink water from the fountain situated north of the fort.<sup>375</sup>

There was also another transit camp at Grootfontein, where recruits waiting to go south and repatriating workers returning home were housed. According to Ndadi the camp at Grootfontein was of a poor standard and in an inhuman state because it was filthy and hot, and occupants had to use dirty, lice-infested blankets to spread on the concrete floors and another to cover themselves. There were no lavatory facilities, which meant that twenty people had to share a bucket for the toilet. Migrants were starving, as they were only fed maize meal porridge on a daily basis and a small piece of meat was available only once a week.<sup>376</sup>

Hunger was not only experienced at the Ondangwa waiting *pondok* and in the SWANLA camps, recruits who traveled by train down to the magisterial districts stated that they also felt it, as they were issued with an unbalanced diet. Ndadi tells how he journeyed in 1947 from Grootfontein to Mariental by train for five days surviving only on dry bread.<sup>377</sup> He also reports that at the train station where they were dropped to wait for their employers to pick them up, they were only supplied with mealie meal.<sup>378</sup>

The proclamations 3 of 1917 and 26 of 1925 stipulates that companies that would have more than fifty workers in their establishments (including mine workers) were to have them

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<sup>373</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>374</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 31; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

<sup>375</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>376</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 18. Ndadi's account of compound health conditions overlaps with that of Butchart, 'The industrial Panopticon: mining and the medical construction', p 194, where the author describes how bad conditions in mines compounds were, as they were usually overcrowded and insanitary, exposing occupants to communicable and infectious diseases.

<sup>377</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 18.

<sup>378</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 19, 22.

accommodated in a compound. The decrees also specify that owing to the heavy work the mine workers carried out, the SWA/Namibia labour system set a standard ration scale of what they were to be fed. As stated above, such a sustenance allocation was necessary for the mining sector, which at the same time tried to avoid injuries due to dietary deficiencies.<sup>379</sup> I noted that the other economic sectors were left to employ their own discretion with regard to their employees' accommodation, which included lodging, rations and sanitation. I start with workers who lodged in compounds.

### **Rations and sanitation in compounds**

Gordon states that compounds were run by a white Compound Manager.<sup>380</sup> The migrant labour community called such housing *okomboni* and the Compound Manager was known as *kamukomboni*.<sup>381</sup> Both Gordon and Ndadi argue that compounds functioned like prisons,<sup>382</sup> because the entry and exit movements of residents were controlled.<sup>383</sup> The Compound Manager was responsible for compound residents' housing and meals.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 53; Report of the Administrator of South West Africa, 1929, p 85; NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944; interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>380</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 53. There is also an extensive research on earlier compounds in South Africa by Patrick Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, pp 66-69, 112.

<sup>381</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.30.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu; interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi and unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>382</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 27

<sup>383</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 53; Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 27. Gordon and Ndadi's description of Namibian compounds intersects with Patrick Harries and Alexander Butchart's studies. Their work significantly clarifies that the principal motive of mines management to introduce and lodge African work forces in closed compounds was to prevent large-scale theft of diamonds, to discipline, to regulate a pre-industrial work force as well as to control their movements. Studies also suggest that South African migrant labour health conditions in compound housing was very unsanitary and occupants were exposed to communicable diseases. Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, pp 67-68, 113, 144, 180-181; Butchart, 'The industrial Panopticon,' p 193.

<sup>384</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 53.

Residents in compounds in Namibia did not have to prepare their own food, but were fed from a common kitchen.<sup>385</sup> They obtained meal tickets from the compound police, which were then handed to the cooks when the worker collected his meal (*uuna ta hawala*).<sup>386</sup> Miners were served breakfast in the very early morning before proceeding to work, and thereafter dinner was provided from early afternoon onwards to coincide with the return of the labourers from their shifts.<sup>387</sup> Their meal normally consisted of half a loaf of bread, mealie-meal and either meat or fish, with an occasional serving of vegetables. In addition, coffee, tea and Mageu (*mahewu*) were continually available and occupants were issued each a four-ounce packet of tobacco, a packet of matches, a tin of jam and a bar of soap.<sup>388</sup>

Cleanliness and health issues in the compound were also the Compound Manager's responsibility,<sup>389</sup> which he usually reported to the mine management. For instance in 1929 there was high mortality on mines, which urged the Administration of the Mandated Territory and management of the mines to commission Dr. Fischer to carry out an investigation in order to eradicate the possible focus of enteric infection at Abenab, one of the vanadium mines. One of Fischer's recommendations was that the contents of buckets used as toilets should be removed daily and emptied into the trenches immediately, by those men employed to work with sanitation.<sup>390</sup> Eighty-eight year-old Batromeus Amulungu (whose first contract was in 1946) talks about the working experience of some of his friends employed in the sewage department (*ohanya*) of Windhoek municipality. He says they usually worked night shifts only, collecting and emptying buckets used as toilets from municipal compounds and

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<sup>385</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1929*, p 85.

<sup>386</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>387</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of Witwatersrand Mine Natives Wages Commission Remuneration and Conditions of Employment of Natives on Witwatersrand Gold Mines and Regulation and Conditions of Employment of Natives at Transvaal undertakings of Victoria Falls and Transvaal Power Company Limited, 1943* (Pretoria: Government Printer, 1944), p 30.

<sup>388</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 58; Report of the Administrator of South West Africa, 1924, pp 77-78.

<sup>389</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 53.

<sup>390</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1929*, pp 81-82, 85.

public facilities into municipal lorries. He spoke about when the workload was heavy, and labourers ended up delivering two full buckets to the lorry at the same time, carrying one bucket by hand and the other on the head, risking the contents spilling on their clothes, all of which put their health at risk.<sup>391</sup> Amulungu's description is similar to that of Ndadi who tells how in 1951, he struggled to deliver the pot (full of human waste) from their prison cell in Windhoek to the municipal lorries.<sup>392</sup>

In another case, Dr. A. J. Orenstein C. M.G., Chief of Sanitation of the Rand Mines Limited, was invited by Consolidated Diamond Mines (CDM) to visit the Luderitz Diamond Fields compound to investigate high mortality amongst labourers experienced there in the early 1920s. The report submitted to the Chamber of Mines by Orenstein in 1924 strongly advised an adjustment in the diet scale to prevent scurvy, and to improve the bad design and ventilation of the majority of the compounds. The report criticized the existing galvanized iron huts that accommodated more than forty people and recommended the construction of permanent compounds with sleeping rooms to house not more than twenty-four labourers. It also forbade more than one tier of concrete bunks in a room.<sup>393</sup> After the Medical Officer's recommendations in 1925, CDM gave immediate attention to feeding and clothing, while housing and other projects for the welfare of the labourers dropped (for the time being), owing to the slump in the diamond market that caused the suspension of all mining operations.<sup>394</sup>

### **Housing and rations on farms and other sectors**

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<sup>391</sup> Interview with Batoromeus Amulungu 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu.

<sup>392</sup> Interview with Batoromeus Amulungu 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalanhu and Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 43.

<sup>393</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1924*, p 77.

<sup>394</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1925*, p 79

As argued earlier, aside from the mining industry,<sup>395</sup> other sectors of the South West Africa migrant labour system had no strategic plan that stipulated standards to be met regarding housing and sustenance for workers housed in their establishments. Such liberty made masters handle matters in their way.<sup>396</sup>

Back in Ovamboland, people lodged in huts made of wood with the roof in an umbrella form, neatly thatched with grass and supported by wooden struts.<sup>397</sup> Male bedroom walls were mud-packed<sup>398</sup> and furnished with beds made out of palm tree branches or sticks of other trees like mopane on top of which they placed animal hides as mattresses.<sup>399</sup> This was contrary to accommodation offered at work places on farms.

Petrus Nekunya from Uukolonkadhi says he used to sleep under a tree, as there were no huts in which to sleep. Some labourers from Ondonga who passed their complaints to Chief Kambonde of Ondonga say they also slept under trees, as there were no materials to construct their houses. In the Kalkfeld District on the farm Orongombo for “Frau”<sup>400</sup> Kriesmann, Simon Aludhilu says in the absence of *pondoks*, he and other workers slept under trees and when it was raining, they sought shelter under the chicken coop.<sup>401</sup> Most of the labourers from Uukwambi say there was no accommodation at sheep outposts, thus they suffered most during rains and winter.<sup>402</sup> Andapo yaAnganya who worked on a farm called Kamkande for his employer Hobart (possibly Kobart?), says he had no hut and slept in the sheep kraal.<sup>403</sup> Sub-headman Nonjomba of Ombalantu spoke to Bene Kafe, who worked in the Kalkfeld

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<sup>395</sup> NANFNAO, 4, 2/1V3, Labour recruitment 1937-1938

<sup>396</sup> Shiweda, ‘Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy’, p 119.

<sup>397</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, Annual Report, 1926; Mans, *Changing faces of Aawambo*, p 3.

<sup>398</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 12,

<sup>399</sup> History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 22.

<sup>400</sup> This meant madam. Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>401</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>402</sup> Shiweda, ‘Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy’, p 120; NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>403</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.



District and said when working at the outpost where there was no accommodation, he used to sleep amongst the sheep to keep himself warm.<sup>404</sup>

Some employers discouraged workers from attempting to erect some form of lodging. Chief Kambonde of Ondonga reported that one young man whom he considered to be a general or kitchen worker, says his master broke down his *pondok* for constructing it within his working hours. Nekomba Nepola told his headman Simon Nakapela of Ondonga that when they tried to build themselves a *pondok* the master destroyed it.<sup>405</sup>

Using available materials around their work places, some workers brought their houses into being. Two returned labourers from Ondonga who passed their complaints to Chief Kambonde of Ondonga mentioned they made *pondoks* out of grass, as there were no huts on farms. Simon Shirongo who worked with the Ovambo man Paulus Shiwala from Uukwaluudhi on the farm called Ogden owned by Mrs. W.G. Thomas, related that they also made their hut with grass.<sup>406</sup> Tobias Amupala whose first contract was in 1934 at Voorskronk farm in Mariental said they collected flat stones from the veld when grazing, which they placed on top of each other and constructed their lodgings with heights determined by the availability of stones. He said their houses were without a roof.<sup>407</sup> Martin Haiyambo from Ombalantu who worked in Kalkfeld district on the farm Konori (?) near Otue, as well as at Oshikondo farm near Windhoek owned by Mark Graf, reported that on both farms they built their own *pondoks*. He spoke about the lodging at Oshikondo where it used to rain inside. Because there was lack of building materials on the farm, they could not rehabilitate it.<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

<sup>405</sup> Ibid.

<sup>406</sup> Ibid.

<sup>407</sup> Shiweda, 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 120; interview with Tobias Amupala, 18.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu.

<sup>408</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1

Voipio also argued that on farms where Ovambo worked, some of them sleep under erected zinc sheets and they would get wet and cold when it rained.<sup>409</sup>

Some employers offered their workers a few building materials that they could afford to construct their lodgings. Daniel Shooya (whose first contract was on a farm in Bethanie, Mariental in 1942) relates that he constructed his lodging with stones collected on the farm while herding livestock, which he had been placing one on top of the other up to a height where he could sit inside. His house had a piece of canvas sheet for the roof, the only building material he received from his master.<sup>410</sup> Bene Kafe, who worked in the Kalkfeld District told his sub-headman Nondjoba of Ombalantu that his employer only gave him two pieces of zinc sheeting to use as a roof, which Kafe said he did not use instead he built a hut of grass like that of San people.<sup>411</sup> Tobias Shivute who worked on the farm Gunikas (?) for Johannes Steyn in Gobabis district, says that when it rained they used to get wet as they lived in a shelter covered with sacks. He did not mention how they gained access to this material. He went on to say they had no chance of sitting around a fire to warm themselves (*ya huhulukwe*) as they used to do back in the sending area.<sup>412</sup>

Some workers considered themselves fortunate compared to circumstances elsewhere and mentioned earlier, as they found structures in places (though not to any standard). Leevi Namwiha who worked at Ongobe Naita farm in Okahandja, Omaruru district, in 1953 says their lodging was a leaky shack, constructed with flattened sheets of metal drum containers. He says they could not upgrade it, owing to the absence of similar building materials on the farm. He adds that during rainy seasons they suffered from cold, as they slept on the wet

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<sup>409</sup> Voipio, 'Contract work through Ovambo eyes', p 120.

<sup>410</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>411</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

earthen floor, where he says they first spread maize meal sacks, placed old *oombendeka* on top and then covered themselves with their new blankets. He says further that such lodging served as a bedroom and storeroom as well as a kitchen during the rainy season.<sup>413</sup> Paulus Akwendika worked in Karibib district on the farm Waldhausen owned by “Frau” Muar (?), and says they lodged in bad old Herero *pondoks* that were leaky during the rain and very cold in winter.<sup>414</sup>

However, there were masters that offered support to their employees to ensure they had better accommodation. Oscar Kamati (first contract in 1933) testified that he and others employees on a farm in Gobabis were allowed wheelbarrows, axes and other equipment by their master to construct their houses, which they built with sticks, thatching them with grass and smearing the walls with a mixture of clay soil and cow dung. Otjiherero-speaking people called such housing *uutathe*. He claimed that their lodging was all-season friendly. He went on to say how they furnished their rooms with beds made out of sticks (*oontazi*), and on top of them they placed empty cartons and spread empty maize meal sacks for bed sheets. He said they left those houses behind for the next employees.<sup>415</sup>

Some workers stated that they enjoyed their stay at work places. David Mateus from the Ondonga kingdom told Chief Kambonde of Ondonga that his master was a good person, because he treated him very well and paid him a good wage. From Uukolonkadhi, headman Shimi Imeni declared that Ita Kakare who was employed in Windhoek (though he failed to specify whether he worked in a farm or kitchen) told him that his employer was like a parent to him.<sup>416</sup> Eighty-four year old Israel Shingenge also attested that his master was good. He

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<sup>413</sup> Interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

<sup>414</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>415</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>416</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

says he worked at his hotel in Oranjemund as a general worker from 1954 until 1984 when he retired.<sup>417</sup>

Lodging was not the only aspect employers had liberty with, they also had autonomy over what their employees' diets should consist of<sup>418</sup> as well as what to exclude.<sup>419</sup> Good numbers of farmers for instance starved their workers by feeding them on cheap, poor and insufficient nourishment compared with the nutritious meals they ate at home, which normally consisted of hard porridge prepared out of mahangu flour (*oshifima*), eaten with spinach soup immersed in marula oil or homemade butter.<sup>420</sup> That meal could also be served with pork meat, chicken (raised for their meat), cows and goats' milk, game, and fish brought along by the floods.<sup>421</sup> Mopane worms and dried Makalani palm fruits could also be eaten with *oshifima* and were sometimes eaten without sauce (*taa li oshifima shomukaa*).<sup>422</sup>

Vilho Weyulu, headman of Uukwanyama and one of the traditional authorities who interviewed returning labourers from farms in 1945, reported to the Native Commissioner's office that food on many farms, which mostly consisted of mealie meal or mealie samp, was inadequate.<sup>423</sup> Mealie meal porridge was the only nourishment eaten by shepherds at Jooste farm in Mariental in 1947 who, according to Ndadi, rarely had breakfast.<sup>424</sup> Bene Kafe who worked on a farm in Kalkfeld District told sub-headman Nonjomba of Ombalantu that he

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<sup>417</sup> Interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera.

<sup>418</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 24; Shiweda, 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 119; NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>419</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>420</sup> History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, p 11.

<sup>421</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 16; Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation', p 3; Native Affairs Ovamboland, Annual Report, 1926 and Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 4.

<sup>422</sup> History Research Project UNAM, *Keep our fire burning!*, pp 13, 32; Siiskonon, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, pp 53-56. Aawambo also had several drinks as well as drying various fruits, which they stored for later consumption. See also Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, pp 11-12, 14; Moorsom, 'Underdevelopment and Class Formation,' p 3; NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual Report 1926; Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 4 and unrecorded conversation with Oscar Shimanya, 10, 29, 12. 2015. Olyvahenge, Uukwanyama.

<sup>423</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>424</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 21 and interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

used to receive a cup (size not mentioned) of mealie meal a day, with no salt and no meat.<sup>425</sup>

Andreas yaShaanika from Ongandjera says he received only one cup of mealies per day, which he says he was not given time to pound. Simson Shikage employed by Mr. Pretorius, a farmer in Okahandja district, says his master issued 5 cups of whole mealies for a week, which he says finished before the weekend. He said that to reach to another week, he and other workers had been surviving from stealing milk reserved for the pigs.<sup>426</sup>

Tobias Shivute employed on farm Gunikas (?) for Johannes Steyn in Gobabis district, said that their master only gave them mealie meal, without fat, oil or salt, and no meat, and sometimes he issued them separated milk meant to feed his pigs.<sup>427</sup> Benjamin Samuel who worked on Esere farm near Otavi, owned by “Frau” Funki (?), says they received one small cup of mealie meal in the mornings and at night. He says that was always short, and when they asked for more, they then regularly only got half of what they requested.<sup>428</sup> At the Kamkande farm of Hobart/Kobart (?), Andapo yaAnganya used to get 3 cups of whole mealies and one tin of bully beef a week, while Vaino Mombandja who worked on a farm Karausn (?) in Otjiwarongo, received one small cup of mealie meal a day, with no meat or milk.<sup>429</sup> Simon Shirongo, who worked with Paulus Shiwala from Uukwaluudhi on the farm Ogden of Mrs. W.G. Thomas, said that they used to receive little food.<sup>430</sup> Simon Aludhilu worked in Kalkfeld District on the farm Orongombo for “Frau” Kriesmann and was fed on mealie meal with only a small ration of salt.<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1

<sup>426</sup> Ibid.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>430</sup> Ibid.

<sup>431</sup> Ibid.

In 1933, Oscar Kamati worked on a farm in Gobabis and he says every Saturday each worker received six 500-gram tins of maize meal, a little salt, fatty oil, which he says they then combined, cooked and ate together. On top of that, they were also issued with one 500-gram tin of tobacco (*omakaya gofakata*), which he says he distributed to elders when he returned home, as he never smoked. He said that at their farm, meat had never been part of their rations, but they consumed meat when a sick animal died.<sup>432</sup> Kamati's argument backs up Ndadi who wrote that at Jooste farm in Mariental, they also only ate meat when a diseased animal died.<sup>433</sup> Andreas Muleka (who worked on several farms) says there were few masters who offered their labourers cooking pots,<sup>434</sup> but many of the workers (according to Oscar Kamati, Batoromeus Amulungu and Leevi Namwiha) prepared their food in five litre tins they called *uungulungulu*,<sup>435</sup> which they collected from the farm-dumping site.<sup>436</sup>

Some of the workers were better fed. Paulus Akwendika worked in Karibib district on a farm called Waldhausen owned by 'Frau' Muar (?), and David Mateus (he does not mention the name of the farm) also said they had enough food.<sup>437</sup> This according to Vilho Weyulu, headman of Uukwanyama, comprised mealie meal with meat and occasionally coffee.<sup>438</sup> At Konori (?) farm in Kalkfeld district, Martin Haiyambo from Ombalantu says they received a meal package consisting of mealie meal, coffee and sugar.<sup>439</sup> Jacob Shatipamba whose first contract was in 1948, related that their master on a farm in Grootfontein district used to give an old ewe or slaughtered a goat for employees to have meat.<sup>440</sup> Titus Kamweethako and

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<sup>432</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, on 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>433</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 21.

<sup>434</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga.

<sup>435</sup> Those tins usually contained Jeyes Fluid, which farmers treated or dipped their livestock with against ticks and other external parasites.

<sup>436</sup> Interview with Oscar Kamati, on 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Tobias Amupala, 18.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu and interview with Leevi Namwiha, on 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga.

<sup>437</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid.

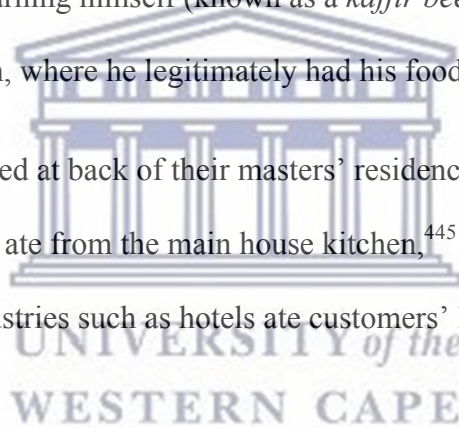
<sup>439</sup> Ibid.

<sup>440</sup> Interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama.

Junias Ndakola says when an animal was slaughtered at some farms, employers offered workers hooves, intestines, bones without flesh, and the head with the tongue removed.<sup>441</sup>

Kitchen workers on farms were considered very fortunate as employees in the system when it came to feeding. Toivo ya Petrus who worked in the kitchen at a farm in Grootfontein district says he usually ate at work.<sup>442</sup> Herman Shongolo, who worked in the kitchen in Mariental says the “Missus”<sup>443</sup> (*mwiishishi*) would call “*Herman bring jou beeker, laat ek vir jou koffie gee*” meaning “Herman bring your cup I would like to give you coffee,” or “*bring jou bord, laat ek jou kos skenk (gee)*”, “bring your plate I would like to give you food”. However, he says that his metal plate (*okayaha kesha*) and cup, which was a tin with a handle of wire put there to prevent him from burning himself (known as a *kaffir beeker*) was kept on the branch of a tree, close to the kitchen, where he legitimately had his food.<sup>444</sup>

Domestic servants who lodged at back of their masters’ residences did not have anywhere to prepare their food, thus they ate from the main house kitchen,<sup>445</sup> while most of those employed in hospitality industries such as hotels ate customers’ leftovers.<sup>446</sup>



### **Sanitation on farms and other industrial sectors**

Contract workers I spoke with say that sanitation on farms depended on where the farm was situated. If there was forest or bushes, then they turned those into toilets. If there were valleys

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<sup>441</sup> Interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi and unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>442</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>443</sup> According to Shongolo “*missus*” is an English concept that Aawambo had difficulties in pronouncing, thus they would say “*mwiishishi*” when referring or calling an employers’ wives. Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 20 also mentions that workers in the contract labour system were forced to call the wife of the *baas* “*missus*”.

<sup>444</sup> Interview with Herman Shongolo, 01.01.2013, Ontananga, Ondonga.

<sup>445</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 27; interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi and interview with Herman Shongolo, 01.01.2013, Ontananga, Ondonga.

<sup>446</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 27.

(*omilamba*) close by, they would then become shelter when nature called. On farms located in desert-like areas, workers chose comfortable sites to relieve themselves.<sup>447</sup> Shooya, who worked in a bakery in Usakos town says he shared the loo with the master's family, which he says a Herero woman working as a domestic servant used to clean.<sup>448</sup>

### **Mortality in migrant labour**

The 1929 Administrator of SWA's annual report records high mortality in numerous mines in the country caused by several diseases, and many of the deceased were from Ovamboland who were on twelve-month or twenty-four month contracts.<sup>449</sup> The above statement provoked many thoughts in me, such as the impact those deaths had on their colleagues, as well as on how news of bereavement was delivered to families back in the sending area after such a long period, as it seems that some of the labourers died when they had just arrived at the mine.<sup>450</sup>

The industrial death case to which I dedicated some research occurred in 1963. The year was outside of this study framework, but was witnessed by Sem Ekandjo from Uukwaluudhi kingdom, whose first contract was in 1942. Ekandjo narrates the story as translated below:

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<sup>447</sup> Interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016, Ohaukelo, Ondonga; interview with Leevi Namwiha, 28.08.2016, Omulondo, Onayena, Ondonga; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauwe, Ombalanhu; interview with Titus Kamweethako, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Petrus Kalola, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Jeremia Shikongo, 05.01.2016, Omugulu gwOmbashe, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Sem Ekandjo, 06.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi; interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi; interview with Frans Weyulu, 30.12.2015, Okandi kaAdolf, Uukwanyama; interview with Isak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera; interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera; interview with Jakob Shatipamba, 23.03.2016, Olupundi, Uukwanyama and unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>448</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>449</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1929*, pp 78-81 reports on mortality figures from influenza at the Tsumeb OMEG Group mine as experienced from 1925 to 1929; in 1925 there were 36 deaths (15.02 mortality); in 1926, 61 deaths (27.06 mortality); in 1927, 179 deaths (70.64 mortality); in 1928, 107 deaths (43.23 mortality) and in 1929 the number of cases was 1398, the number of deaths 165, with case mortality at 11.80 and the death rate per 1000 at 63.98. See also Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 21; Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, p 125.

<sup>450</sup> Union of South Africa, *Report of the Administrator of South West Africa 1929*, p 85.



It was some minutes to 1 o'clock on 4 September 1963<sup>451</sup> at South Africa Railways & Harbours at Walvis Bay, Namibia, when as usual Andreas Pinehas a roommate and colleague to Ekandjo (both at supervisor level) told him they would go together for lunch. Pinehas promised Ekandjo that he would join him soon after he had checked on the team offloading a consignment on the other side of the ship. As many minutes passed, Ekandjo went in the direction Andreas said he was going to collect him, and asked those he found there where Andreas was. They told him that they did not see him. They joined each other in searching. Later Ekandjo called others to come and listen, after he heard a cry from an empty storage room. Ekandjo and some colleagues climbed down and found Andreas lying down helplessly with many of his bones broken after falling in the stowing compartment.

Ekandjo says that he reported the incident to the masters, who called an ambulance immediately and requested him to accompany Andreas to Walvis Bay Native Hospital. In the absence of the family, he was registered as the next of kin and the hospital contacted him when Andreas passed away on 6 September 1963,<sup>452</sup> which he again reported to the management team. The funeral was arranged and attended by fellow workers, SAH&R management members and the friends from the location. He relates that the employers bought two blankets and a mattress where the corpse was placed in between, wrapped with blankets, and laid to rest in the African cemetery situated north of the European one in Walvis Bay town. On 18 September 2017, I visited the neglected non-European burial ground where I found many old pieces of wood lying around the plot, which I hope were part of crosses that marked the graves of the deceased. Such conditions made it difficult for me to identify Andreas's grave.

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<sup>451</sup> Interview with Sem Ekandjo, 06.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>452</sup> See Kuisebmond grave registration book for 1960-1997, Figure 11 in this chapter.

Elsewhere I argue that dating back to the earlier days, Aawambo developed a custom that the wellbeing of a human depended on the next person and that meant if one died away from home such a person ensured the deceased's personal effects reached home. These effects represented the corpse, which could not be transported home due to lack of transport.<sup>453</sup> In this case, Ekandjo (a close friend to the deceased) ensured that he handed Andreas' blankets, belt *omwiya/epaya* and clothes to an Oshindonga-speaking man whom Andreas had earlier introduced to him as a neighbour back in Ovamboland, to deliver them to his family when he had completed his contract.<sup>454</sup> The deceased's family confirmed that the man who delivered the referred personal effects was Jason Fillemon Kangwini Awene.<sup>455</sup> By delivering the grievous news of Andreas to his family, Awene was just carrying out the Oshiwambo custom which was imparted to every Ovambo at a tender age and not part of the contract labour system.<sup>456</sup>

On 22 August 2017, I paid Awene a visit to interview him about how Andreas' family received the anguishing news. Keeping eye contact, as is part of Oshiwambo custom, Awene and I greeted one another. I then introduced myself as a daughter of Aina Pinehas, elder sister to Andreas Pinehas, whose personal effects he had delivered to his family fifty-four years ago, and that my visit concerned that specific event.

After introductions, Awene diverted his eye contact to an old, but dry wound between the thumb and index finger of his left hand, which he started rubbing. He later shifted to his right thumb and began pulling down a small skin, which was a bit detached and eventually succeeded in removing it, but it left him bleeding. Such actions and movements were observed throughout the interview, which went as follows:

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<sup>453</sup> See Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 61.

<sup>454</sup> Interview with Sem Ekandjo, 06.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>455</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Vistorina Festus, 06.11.2016, Opeleka, Ondonga.

<sup>456</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change' p 58.

Lovisa: You were the one who brought the deceased personal effects, according to the family. In detail, could you please tell how did you deliver the news?

Awene: (*Anxious, softly and in short*) Yes (*After answering the first question, he then went quiet*).

Observing his silence and the brevity of the response, I quickly realized that using open-ended questions to explain what happened would not work, thus I decided to query him using information I obtained from the interview with Sem Ekandjo.

Lovisa: According to a Kwaluudhi-speaking man by the name Ekandjo (a colleague to the deceased), he brought the deceased's belongings to your room, as according to him you lodged in the same compound, but in different rooms.

Awene: No, the deceased and I shared the room as we worked together.

Lovisa: What job did the two of you do?

Awene: Caught fish.

Lovisa: So, the two of you worked as anglers?

Awene: No (*break*).

Lovisa: If you were not, then how have you been catching fish?

Awene: (*Did not respond*).

Lovisa: Ekandjo told me that, the man he passed the deceased's belongings to was a man who worked in a fish factory, while the late Andreas and him worked as supervisors' at South Africa Railways & Harbours.

Awene: (*Changed his answer that he worked in a fish factory, while Andreas was in railways*).

Lovisa: What position did you occupy in the fish factory?

Awene: Sealing fish tins machine operator.

Lovisa: Did you attend Andreas's funeral? If yes, who else attended and where were they from?

Awene: Yes, I attended and there were other people too.

Lovisa: Who were those other people and where were they from?

Awene: (*He took long to respond*).

Lovisa: (*Breaking silence*) Were they perhaps community members'/the deceased's colleagues?

Awene: They were deceased's colleagues.

Lovisa: Ok. Could you tell how Andreas buried?

Awene: Cannot remember.

Lovisa: Ekandjo says, he passed Andreas' belongings to you after the funeral, how did he know that you knew him (the late)?

Awene: (*Did not answer*).

Lovisa: Had perhaps Andreas introduced you two to each other?

Awene: Andreas introduced us.

Lovisa: Tell me how you delivered the news to Andreas' family. Did you first break the news or hand over the belongings? What influenced your choice?

Awene: Cannot recollect.

Lovisa: What approach did the recipient of your news use in alerting other family members in the homestead about the news you brought?

Awene: Cannot recall.

Lovisa: Do you mean the person you talked to did not wail or scream, as is the Oshiwambo custom when news of bereavement is received?

Awene: Cannot remember.

Lovisa: Could you please mention what exactly the deceased's effects were?

Awene: Cannot recall.

Lovisa: Were they probably not his belt, blankets and so forth?<sup>457</sup>

Awene: We delivered those effects.

Lovisa: Were there other people that accompanied you?

Awene: Yes.

Lovisa: What are their names and how many were they?

Awene: They were two and I cannot recall their names.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, p 116.

<sup>458</sup> Interview with Jason Fillemon Awene, 22.08.2017, Amusa, Ondonga.

Awene's reactions and body language including avoiding eye contact, being brief and skipping some of the obvious questions about Andreas' death, I link this to the argument of Meeren, Heijnsbergen and Gelder who say the face and the body of an individual normally convey his or her emotional state.<sup>459</sup> Having being informed by Andreas' family and Sem Ekandjo (whom I interviewed first about Andreas' death) that Awene was just a messenger who delivered the personal effects, I decided to probe and get as much information from him as I could despite his unresponsiveness. Because Awene was from the same areas as Andreas he was assigned the task to deliver his personal effects, and this aspect gave me confidence to prolong the interview. I would have expected members of Andreas' family and Sem Ekandjo who was close and witnessed the fatal accident and death of Andreas to have possibly been traumatized, and not someone who was just the messenger.

Concerning Awene's lack of response, I would suggest that he was at war with his conscience (*okwa li miita nokaana ke kokomwenyo*) and this made me conclude that he knew more than he was saying. I think he withheld names of those who escorted him with the intention of preventing me from talking to them, possibly fearing they would reveal what he is concealing. His overall conduct over the dialogue indicates that it affected him greatly, something which I only expected from the deceased family members and perhaps the close friend of the deceased. After the interview, I requested Awene to let me know if I should come over, should he remember something that he would like us to discuss further, but he shattered any anticipation I had by saying he was not going to remember anything. Since that was only the first visit, I was hoping to get clarity around questions that bounced back and those he could not remember, during a second visit. My plan was to suggest that he should

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<sup>459</sup> H. K. M. Meeren, C. C. R. J. van Heijnsbergen and B. de Gelder, 'Rapid perceptual integration of facial expression and emotional body language'. Institute of Technology, Cambridge, (8 November 2005), [www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0507650102](http://www.pnas.org/cgi/doi/10.1073/pnas.0507650102). Accessed on 19 May 2019.

see a counsellor over the matter, assistance I doubt he got before his last breath, as I was informed that he had passed away on 16 November 2018.

Regarding death in the contract labour system in SWA/Nambia, Namhila argues that when a 'native' died in the Police Zone, by law an employer was expected to report such death to a Magistrate, Native Commissioner or nearest authorized office. Employers were expected to submit their identification pass, together with any wages due to the deceased,<sup>460</sup> especially if he died by accident while on duty. Namhila reveals that some employers tried to avoid paying compensation by putting in allegations that the deceased willfully caused an accident.<sup>461</sup>

She argues further that employers were expected to hand over the deceased's personal effects to approved offices no matter how dilapidated and worthless they were, because some communities attach great importance to them. Namhila goes on to say that although regulations on belongings of the dead were clear, some offices ignored directives and destroyed the mentioned items, claiming they were of no value.<sup>462</sup> Amongst items ruined, she lists the belt *epaya* or *omwiya*,<sup>463</sup> a significant cultural object that would assure Ovambo families that a male person (who had been away) is dead. Once such an item reached home, mourning would then take place.<sup>464</sup>

Namhila makes an essential argument here, that the cause of death is highly important for families, especially for those persons who died on duty in accident-related cases because one could demand compensation from employers. She further states that death notices were also crucial for the family, and for social history and other research, because it seems that many of

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<sup>460</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, pp 114-115.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid, pp 115, 121.

<sup>462</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, pp 113-126.

<sup>463</sup> See Shigwedha, 'Pre-Colonial Costume of the Aawambo', p 131.

<sup>464</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama; interview with Sylvia Iyambo, 18.08.2016, Ohalumbele, Uukolonkadhi and interview with Ligoleni Ilenikelago Mukongo, 04.01.2016, Ontanda yaIthete, Uukwaluudhi.

the hospital records were destroyed.<sup>465</sup> The record destruction that Namhila spoke about hindered me from investigating how Andreas' death was treated, because it fell between 21.11.57 – 1.11.63, whose records and files were destroyed.<sup>466</sup> Below see the list in the destruction certificate from the Magistrate's Office of Walvis Bay to the National Archives depot. The certificate states that documentation was destroyed owing to a lack of space in the Walvis Bay archives. The mode of how the documents were destroyed is not stated.

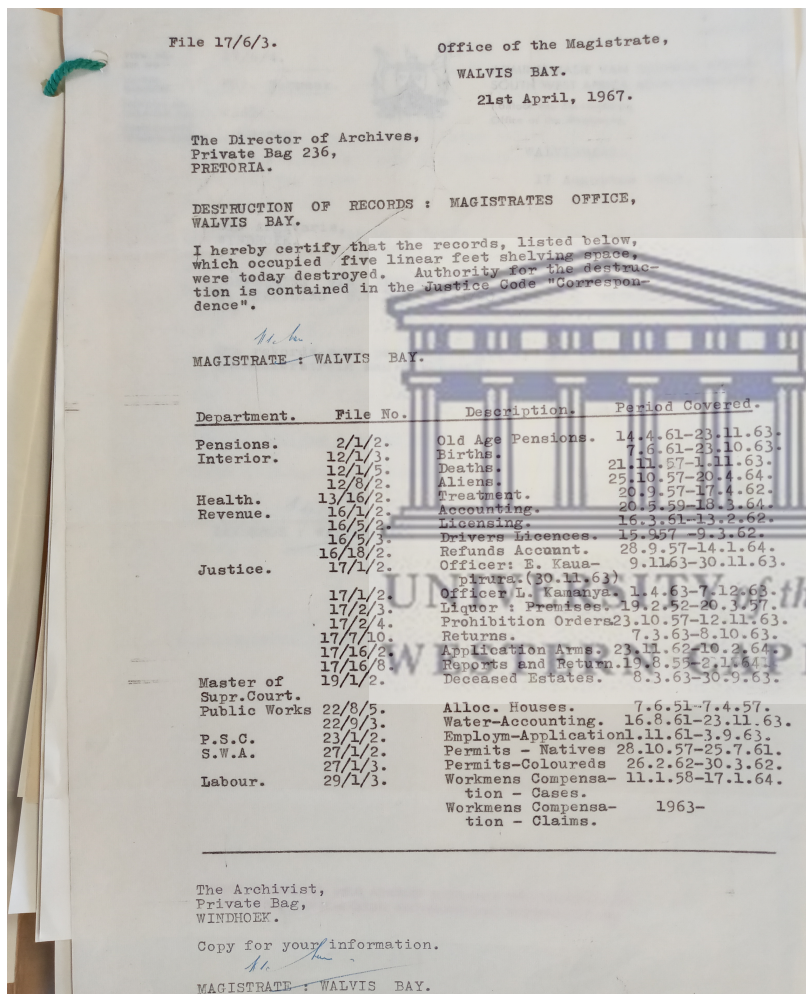


Figure 10: Interior 12/1/5, Deaths 21.11.57 - 1.11.63. ARG, 3, 4/3/20 – Oorplasing van dokumente en Publikasies NA ARGIEF, Walvis Baai. Source: National Archives of Namibia.

<sup>465</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, p 121.

<sup>466</sup> *Ibid*, p 106.



My findings in the National Archives forced me to visit the archives of Walvis Bay Municipality to check if I would find something on Andreas' death. I was referred to the Head of Section of the Parks and Cemeteries Division, where Lucky Shipanga gave me access to the grave registration book of 1960-1997 (written in Afrikaans) and I found information on Andreas Jacobs who died in 1963. Shipanga assisted with translating the details into English, and most of the particulars (see Figure 11) are close to that of Andreas, except for his age<sup>467</sup> and the surname Jacobs instead of Pinehas, which possibly might have resulted from the negligence of the recording officials when writing out this detail.<sup>468</sup>



Figure 11: Above is the cover of Kuisebmond grave registration book 1960–1997, where figure 12 is derived from. Source: Section of the Parks and Cemeteries Division, Walvis Bay Municipality, Namibia.

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<sup>467</sup> Namhila argues that South African Railways and Harbours death notice forms for Natives designed without the age provision (apparently on the assumption that “Natives” do not know their birth date), *Recordkeeping and Missing “Native Estate” Records*, p 120.

<sup>468</sup> NAN, RCO, No. 2/1916-1918, Miscellaneous Correspondence and Native Labour.

GRAAF No.	NAAM VAN OORLEDENE	GRAAF No.	AM No.	WYN DORPE	VERSTORFTEDATUM	VERSTORFTEDATUM	VERSTORFTEDATUM	VERSTORFTEDATUM
365	Jessie Rensch	13508	18.8.63	38 jr.	M	Acute Pneumonia		
366	Christina Eick	13517	12.8.63	18	M	Pneumonia		
367	Alfred Vries	13544	22.8.63	34	M	Leptospirosis		
368	Joseph van Rensen	13769	30.8.63	24	M	Rhesus Incompatibility		
369	Christophina Shipanga	13883	31.8.63	22	V	Broncho Pneumonia		
370	Katrina Hauptsta	13868	1.9.63	5 jr.	V	Pneumonia		
371	Doortgehoore kind	13941	3.9.63		M			
372	Andreas Jacobs	205	6.9.63	32 jr.	M	Respiratory		
373	Andreas Beerman	Andreas	10.9.63	35 jr.	M	Acute Pulmonale		

Figure 12: The second name from the bottom is believed to be Andreas's. This page is taken from Kuisebmond registration book and its content is in Afrikaans language. Source: Section of the Parks and Cemeteries Division, Walvis Bay Municipality, Namibia.

After the last Union Native Commissioner Harold Eedes left Ovamboland in 1954, the new official language was introduced in SWA/Namibia and all correspondence including that of the labour system was now done in Afrikaans. The Afrikaans language replaced English when the National Party (favouring Afrikaner nationalism) won the election in South Africa in 1948.<sup>469</sup> An instance of Afrikaans correspondence then is the graves registration book of Kuisebmond in Walvis Bay (see above), where with Lucky Shipanga's assistance I translated particulars I believe to belong to Andreas Pinehas into English (to accommodate those who do not speak and understand Afrikaans). The details are,

(*Naam van Oorledene*) - Name of the deceased, Andreas Jacobs,

(*Graf*) - Grave No: 372,

<sup>469</sup> W. Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa*, (Oxford University Press: United States, 2001), p 143.

(*Kwitansie*) - receipt No: 205,

(*Datum van Oorldene*) - Date of death 6.9.63,

(*Ouderdom*) - age 32 (jaar) - years,

(*Geslag*) - Gender, (manlike) – male and (*Oorsaak van dood*) - The reason for death,

(*Verdrinking*) – drowned.

Family members I spoke to informed me that as soon as Andreas' personal effects reached home (the following year) in May 1964, somebody was sent to Olukonda parish to report his death,<sup>470</sup> which according to Olukonda parish deceased book registered as 20 May 1963.

When I queried whether the date of death at parish was when the family received Andreas' belongings, or the death was reported at church, they say due to so much time passing they could not remember. This means that Andreas' date of death differs between the Walvis Bay Municipality register and that of Olukonda parish. Underneath is the Olukonda parish deceased book cover.



Figure 13: This is the cover of the Olukonda parish deceased registration book where pages in Figures 14 and 15 appear. Source: Olukonda Parish, Oshikoto Region, Namibia.

<sup>470</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; unrecorded conversations with Vistorina Festus, 06.11.2016, Opeleka, Ondonga and Martha Leonard Nevonga, 08, 25, 03. 2017, Onandomba, Ondonga.

The page below is derived from the Olukonda deceased registration book, where Andreas Pinehas is named third from the bottom. The date of funeral slot is left blank, an indication that he was buried somewhere else and not at Olukonda cemetery. Andreas was born in 1937, died at the age of 26 years and his particulars were transferred from the book of the living at page 384 III.

Parish	Expenses	Name	Age	Funeral
1-168	27/11	I Amanda Amunjanjo		
3-168	27/11	Petrus Namjembu	1892	71
4-168	27/11	Maria Ahakali	1878	85
5-168	25/6	Andreas	1/2/55	8
3-63	2/12	Hosius	1/2/63	63
4-63	5/10	Petrus	1946	17
4-63	8/6	209 I Shes	1/2/59	2
4-63	19/2	278 II Eldon	1905	58
5-63	7/1	I Kristof Josua	1901	61
4-63	4/2	230 I Agul Augustus Johannes	18/6/62	-
4-63	2/6	I Hilari	3/63	-
4-63	3/1	J Andreas Paulus	7/5/4	-
4-63	1/1	152 II Paulus Kristof	5/62	-
4-63	8/6	271 II Frieda Anpula	1894	69
5-63	3/6	320 I	2/62	-
4-63	5/1	215 II Justus Josafata	2/594	-
4-5	1/1	101 Andreas Sakeus	23/68	-
2/56	1/1	184 II Andreas Pinehas	1737	2
2/56	1/1	211 I Johannes Andreae	12/62	-
2/56	1/1	211 I Johannes Andreae	19/43	21
2/56	1/1	315 I Festus i Ananas	10/65	-

Figure 14: The list of the names of the dead taken from the Olukonda deceased book and that indicates that Andreas is buried somewhere else and not at Olukonda cemetery. Source: Olukonda Parish, Oshikoto Region, Namibia.

### Impact of Andreas' death on other workers and family back home

Benya argues that numerous rituals performed at home served as a transition between home and work, and prepare workers to face a new work life including the acceptance of

possibilities of death and accidents that might take place in workplaces.<sup>471</sup> Rites were crucial because the labour system in southern Africa was widely known as exploitative and brutal, with high mortality rates.<sup>472</sup> The latter brings us to the discussion of the impact of workers' death on colleagues, which Ekandjo says makes one think of one's own death. Madala<sup>473</sup> cited in Benya's paper made a similar argument to that of Ekandjo when he remarks that: "you know you can die any minute underground ...you have seen people die...Everyone knows someone who has died here (underground)...but you cannot let that stop you, you have to feed your family...you put that at the back of your mind".<sup>474</sup>

According to Ekandjo the SAR&H workplace was risky, because to enter or leave the stowage room to load or offload goods, labourers used a chain ladder or transported goods by winch (*olema*). He says though they feared for their lives, they could not break the contract, as it constituted a criminal offence.<sup>475</sup> Therefore, they worked until they completed their contracts, the moment for which Ekandjo says employees at SAR&H usually yearned. Ekandjo's argument is supported by Lefu<sup>476</sup> who says that underground, mineworkers' conversations in the afternoon were always celebratory ones. There was a lot of joking, pushing around and so forth.<sup>477</sup> It seems that the end of the day or contract was ever jubilant to those employed at risky workplaces.

Ekandjo says that the first six months after Andreas' death were full of nightmares. The picture of Andreas lying in the storage room with an injured head, his right eye out and many broken bones, is what he had been seeing when he tried to sleep. His cries at the hospital

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<sup>471</sup> Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', pp 16, 24.

<sup>472</sup> See Shigwedha, 'Pre-Colonial Costume of the Aawambo', pp 78-81.

<sup>473</sup> An employee at Impala Platinum Limited located in South Africa, Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', p 24.

<sup>474</sup> Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', p 24.

<sup>475</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estate" Records*, p 125.

<sup>476</sup> An underground mine worker at Impala Platinum Limited, cited in Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', p 20.

<sup>477</sup> Benya, 'Women miners and mining spaces', p 20.

while waiting for nurses to attend to him, asking for water to drink (*pii ndje omeya, onda sa enota*), remained fresh in his mind for an even longer period.<sup>478</sup>

In my other work, I have argued that Aawambo families had a strong support system of caring for their loved ones who were sick, and prepared their souls to depart freely to the ancestors' world.<sup>479</sup> It is believed that such missed rituals and preparations performed on their last days, and being cared for by strangers, meant that they died a lonely death (*ya sa eso lyuupongo*).<sup>480</sup> As migrating south was the family's decisions,<sup>481</sup> families back home had been usually waiting for their loved ones on contract to bring wealth home.<sup>482</sup> This was the same in Andreas' family, which unfortunately only got his personal effects instead of what he earned in the south, *koushimba*.<sup>483</sup> Family members whom I spoke to say the news was hard to accept, and it badly affected the health of Andreas' grandmother.<sup>484</sup> They state further that ever since the grievous news was received, Andreas' granny (*yinakulu*) had been wailing from time to time, questioning why her grandson had to die far away. "It would have been better if he came to die at home," she suggested while weeping ("*Okatekulu kandje, okokule ngaa ka ka sila, ka ke ya wo tuu ka sile pungaye*"?) Relatives I interviewed say that Amutenja who had been struggling to come to terms with her grandson's death because of the bond they shared, was admitted three months later to Onandjokwe Mission Hospital.

Interviewees say apart from the nurses who had medically attended to her, some elder women relatives were also at her bedside. According to them, in her last weeks Amutenja uttered

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<sup>478</sup> Interview with Sem Ekanjo, 06.01.2016, Ontanda yIithete, Uukwaluudhi.

<sup>479</sup> See Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 58.

<sup>480</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Vistorina Festus, 06.11.2016, Opeleka, Ondonga.

<sup>481</sup> Maphosa, 'Remittances and Development: The impact of migration', p 134.

<sup>482</sup> See Shigwedha, 'The Pre-colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 208.

<sup>483</sup> See Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 61.

<sup>484</sup> In an interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga, I was informed that her grandmother Katrina Amutenja was much affected by her brother's death, as she (the grandmother) was the one who brought him up from the age of two years.

“my grandchild” (*okatekulu kandje*) and went mute. Amutenja who was born in 1885 passed on 6 October 1964 at the age of seventy-nine.<sup>485</sup>

Age	Sex	Name	Parents	Birth Date	Age	Death Date	Other
175	I	Filemon Okatekulu		18/10/61	1/61		
12	II	Lina Johannes		13/63			
261		Marta Israel		14/61	2		
125	I	Magdalena Ndapua Ilia		13/63	2		
125	I	Hanna Tomas		13/63			
232	E	Reinhold Petrus Okatu		1/4/17			
243	III	Hilanija David Sabau		12/61	22		
351	I	Joel Kusika		12/53	11-12-8		
377	I	Hanna Nahastana		1884	80		
262		Filemon Elias		16/61	3		
176		Fredricka Petrus			2		
280		Immanuel Samuel		27/63			
314		Anna Johanna		1/20	55	18/12/88	
402		Jakobina Frans		1/63			
617	I	Brastus			56	16/1918	
44	I	Loide				29/22	
242		Katrina Amutenja		1885	77	23/3	
26		Tomas			2		

Figure 15: Katrina Amutenja passed on five months after received the death news of her grandson Andreas and is buried at Olukonda cemetery. Source: Olukonda Parish, Oshikoto Region, Namibia.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored how the systematized migrant labour strategies of the colonial administration and industrialists was experienced by contract labourers through numerous carefully designed infrastructures. The project created forms of control with which it

<sup>485</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga and unrecorded conversation with Martha Leonard Nevonga, 08, 25, 03. 2017, Onandomba, Ondonga.

disciplined workers' bodies, habits and the ways in which worker agency evaded or shaped the system.<sup>486</sup> Through labour infrastructures, the workers experienced the power of the state<sup>487</sup> and its politics in a direct and embodied way that von Schnitzler argues does not necessarily manifest freely, but appears constrained and less visible.<sup>488</sup> I argue that to avoid criticism, the colonial administration carefully set the contract labour policies and strategies,<sup>489</sup> leaving some loose because they lacked capacity to monitor their implementation. Through such given liberty employees ended up receiving different treatment, which I argue was determined by how the masters valued their workers. I learnt that some employers fed their workers well, offered them reasonable accommodation, while some of the employees lived and experienced the contrary.

One of the policies that I learnt meant 'good' was the attempt by the administration to sensitize employers on how to administer deaths of Natives, including those of contract workers who died in the Police Zone. Part of that policy cautioned the masters to ensure that the deceased's personal effects (no matter how dilapidated they were) must reach their families in the sending area. This seems to signal that the administration had an in-depth view of the Aawambo culture. In addition, the administration embraced and employed part of the intangible infrastructure<sup>490</sup> by succeeding in fixing up the tracing of the dead's next of kin.<sup>491</sup> In this chapter, I also presented arguments that suggest that the labour system was not only ruthless as many argued, but had a side that also showed some humanity.

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<sup>486</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour Recruiting 1920 – 1941; in an interview with Oscar Kamati, 27.05.2016, says he witnessed several cases where successful potential recruits helped the struggling others to get recruited.

<sup>487</sup> NANFNAO, 7, 2/1, 1945, NCO, 2/1/1 (Native Commission Ovamboland) Returning labourer complaints, Reference No. 2/1/1.

<sup>488</sup> Antina von Schnitzler, 'Infrastructure, Apartheid Techno-politics, and Temporalities of 'Transition'', unpublished paper presented at the University of the Western Cape, Seminar No: 429, on 21 April 2015, p 4.

<sup>489</sup> Which many of them signaled that the administration showed a certain care about the labourers.

<sup>490</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 58.

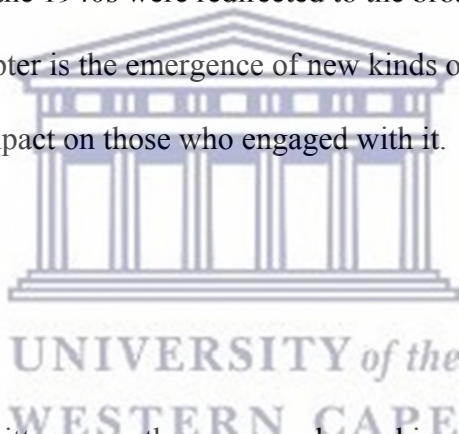
<sup>491</sup> Namhila, *Recordkeeping and Missing "Native Estates" Records*, p 117.



## CHAPTER 5

### TECHNOLOGY AND THE CONTRACT LABOUR SYSTEM

This chapter analyses in detail why the colonial administration introduced certain modern services into the contract labour system with which migrant workers from the north-central part of Namibia formerly known as Ovamboland working in the south, and their families back in the sending area, engaged. It explores how the Ovambo communities responded to and even embraced some of services such as the remittance services as well as the post office infrastructure, which late in the 1940s were redirected to the broader Ovambo population. The central issue of this chapter is the emergence of new kinds of colonial infrastructure<sup>492</sup> for migrant labour and its impact on those who engaged with it.



#### Remittances

France Maphosa defines remittances as the way people working away from their communities of origin send cash or non-cash stuffs home, aiming to uplift their families' living standard.<sup>493</sup> The archives of the colonial administration indicate that Ovambo labourers in the Police Zone engaged in numerous setups to remit money and materials home, one of them was the formal channel instituted late in the 1920s called the Ovamboland Remittance Services.<sup>494</sup> This facility was made use of by a number of Ovambo workers from its infancy. The Annual Reports of 1931 indicated that in 1930 a huge amount of money made its way to

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<sup>492</sup> The infrastructure I refer to here is those facilities and systems that the colonial administration in South West Africa installed to afford convenient services. The administration is said to have readdressed some of its services especially those meant for communication purposes for the Ovambo community to use.

<sup>493</sup> Maphosa, 'Remittances and Development: The impact of migration', pp 133 – 134, 140-141.

<sup>494</sup> NANFNAO 8, 11/V3, Annual Report, 1930; NANFNAO, 8, 2/3 V9 Complaints, cases, Enquiries and disputes (outside Ovamboland, Part I, 1939-1946); NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V2, Annual Report, 1929.

Ovamboland, of which £183.3.6 was received from Magistrates' offices country wide, while an amount of £1629 was remitted via Mr. Cope (the recruiting officer at Ondangwa).<sup>495</sup>

To reduce the chances of disappointing clients, the colonial administration had proper and effective arrangements in place that ensured remitted funds reached the intended beneficiaries. The officials at the District Magistrate's Office assisted remitters with filling out the application form listing the sender's particulars such as his name, address, the amount of money he was remitting and its purpose, as well as the recipient's details such as their first names, father's names, tribe, headmen's names and wards (*omikunda*).<sup>496</sup> The stated details were forwarded to the Native Commissioner's office at Ondangwa, which in the end prepared receipts locally referred to as *uufilipi*, and addressed them to headmen who eventually passed them (receipts) to beneficiaries to collect the remitted goods.<sup>497</sup>

The Ovamboland Remittance Services (ORS) was not initially instituted deliberately for the Ovambo labourers' to employ, but was inaugurated primarily as a postal service for the administration to communicate with offices from various sectors in and outside the region. After the administration realized the need, it decided to redirect the facility to the Ovambo labourers and their communities to use.

Correspondence filed under Ref., N.A. 1/21/25 dated 27 February 1925 from the Office of Native Affairs in Tsumeb shows a request to the Officer in Charge of Native Affairs Ondonga to trace, collect and remit hospital fees which Johannes and Chanika Kauwie owed

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<sup>495</sup> NAO, Annual report, 1929; NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V4, Annual report, 1931; NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V3, Annual reports 1930; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941; NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V9, Annual report, 1936.

<sup>496</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>497</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V3, Annual report 1930; NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V4, January 1931; NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941.

Karibib Hospital.<sup>498</sup> This indicates that the service had already been in use before being purposefully redirected to Ovambo people for their use.

Apart from workers, the document noted that there were also individuals in the region who made use of the remittance service. An example was Maria Ampolo, who visited the Ondangwa Native Commissioner's Office on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1946 seeking assistance from the Swakopmund Magistrate to instruct (her grandson) Simon Luanda working in Swakopmund at the time, to remit £3.0.0 to her to buy food. An individual in the south at the time also used the ORS to communicate to somebody working in the neighbouring region. The 'Enquiries and Complaints' file of 1930-1933/4 also states that Katombera Kwenye, a 'Shimbudu' from Angola recruited at Ondangwa on a two years contract and at the time employed at Gainetseb farm in Outjo District, used the ORS to request the Native Commissioner's Office to pass the message to his brother Kumandara. Katombera wanted his brother, at the time working at Runtu Native Commissioner's Office to know that he had lost a bull and that his employer, the widow Mrs. Maria Hoppe (or Hopper) had fined him £15 to which he already paid £8, thus he was asking his brother to send him the balance so that he could settle his 'debt'.<sup>499</sup>

As I argue earlier, workers employed numerous setups to send remittances home and it emerges that some of the labourers engaged informal networks. This channel usually comprised the remitter, the messenger and a witness (*ihoontali*), and never involved paperwork like the formal network. Oral histories suggest that should the messenger fail to deliver the remitted amount to the beneficiaries, those who employed the informal channel might end up seeking assistance from colonial officials to recover their dues. For instance, on 11 February 1946 the Native Commissioner in Ondangwa, Ovamboland, wrote to the

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<sup>498</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941.

<sup>499</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3, Enquiries complaints General Part II, 1930-1933/4.

Magistrate in Otjiwarongo on a complaint laid by Martin Ipinge against Ustus Jesaya. Jesaya was a colleague of Ipinge at Consolidated Diamond Mines in Kolmanskop in 1935, who was subsequently employed in Otjiwarongo. Ipinge sent Jesaya to take £4.0.0 for him to Ovamboland, which he failed to deliver. In spite of several letters which Martin wrote to Jesaya in respect of the money, no reply was received from him and that was the reason why Martin approached the Native Commissioner's office to assist in the matter.<sup>500</sup> There was another communique dated 15 July 1932 from the Magistrate in Luderitz requesting the Native Commissioner in Ovamboland to assist in tracing Josef Shikongo from Ontananga. The local headman Zacharia should collect £4.10/- on his behalf, which the Luderitz magistrate would remit through the Native Commissioner's Office. The money was from Daniel Ekandjo who owed him this amount when he left for Ovamboland on 21 October 1931.<sup>501</sup>

There was also correspondence from the NC in Ondangwa, Ovamboland, written to the Administrator, Windhoek on 13 June 1945 stating that Nambuli Shikale (a blood cousin of late Tobias Shikuambi who died in Outjo during 1944) made an oath that he handed the late Shikuambi £15 to buy him a cart. Unfortunately, Tobias died before January 1945, which was the date he promised to deliver the cart, and the amount was not returned to him. It was the reason Nambuli approached the NC's office to claim a refund for that amount from the deceased's estate. The correspondence from the Administrator in Windhoek dated 22 June 1945 authorized that Nambuli Shikale should receive the sum of £15, which he claims out of that estate and which was recorded as the expenditure No. 717328 issued by the Magistrate of Outjo on 15 March 1945.<sup>502</sup>

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<sup>500</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, File No. 8: 2/3, Complaints, cases, enquiries and Disputes (Outside Ovamboland), Part IX, 1939-1946.

<sup>501</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3, Enquiries complaints General Part II, 1930-1933/4.

<sup>502</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3 V9, Enquiries complaints General Part II, 1930-1933/4.

Cash remittance was not the only formal facility evident in the colonial administration, but the archives indicate that there were also non-cash remittance services. European residents in the region were the only ones allowed to remit goods to the region using such a facility.

Patricia Hayes who argues that in the 1940s, a few Christianized Ndonga male household heads bought ploughs through Finnish missionaries and some headmen through the administration, supports this.<sup>503</sup> Another example appears in the NC Ovamboland's correspondence, where he writes on 13 February 1941 requesting that R.S. Leathered at Government Stores should ask Major Kennard to order another plough for him, the same as last time, on behalf of Izak - an African man of Namutoni.<sup>504</sup>

The issue of natives who were assisted to access non-cash goods in this way was a clear indication that they had no such privilege. I suspect that the colonial administration was forced to redirect the non-cash remittance infrastructure at Ondangwa in 1947,<sup>505</sup> due to the increased number of natives who were approaching European residents to assist them to acquire the goods mentioned, or that they wanted people to remit on their own behalf. Aawambo called such a facility *ongushe*.<sup>506</sup>

Looking at arrangements in place as far as Ovamboland Remittance Services was concerned, I argue that the ORS was effectively managed when compared with the non-cash remittance, as the latter was said to have been operating from open spaces. The Annual Report of 1947-1953 confirms that later railway administration erected small shelters at sites that I probably think served as offices for staff; the colonial administration never built any kind of shed

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<sup>503</sup> P. Hayes. 'The famine of the Dams: Gender, Labour and Politics in Colonial Ovamboland 1929-1930' in Hayes et al (eds), *Namibia under South African rule: Mobility and Containment* (Oxford: James Curry, 1998), p 136.

<sup>504</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, 3, File Number 1/5, Native Staff, Part II, 1946.

<sup>505</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, Annual Reports, Quartely Report, April-September 1947; Annual Reports of 1953.

<sup>506</sup> In an interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga, he says due to the challenge of pronouncing the English term 'goods shed', Aawambo formed an Oshiwambo term *ongushe*, which sounds similar to the English word.

infrastructure for keeping remitted goods. That meant apart from ensuring that African men were appointed to receive and distribute parcels to beneficiaries,<sup>507</sup> the government did little as far as this facility was concerned. This situation just explained is backed up by the image of the Ohangwena goods shed at Oshikango administrative centre shown below.

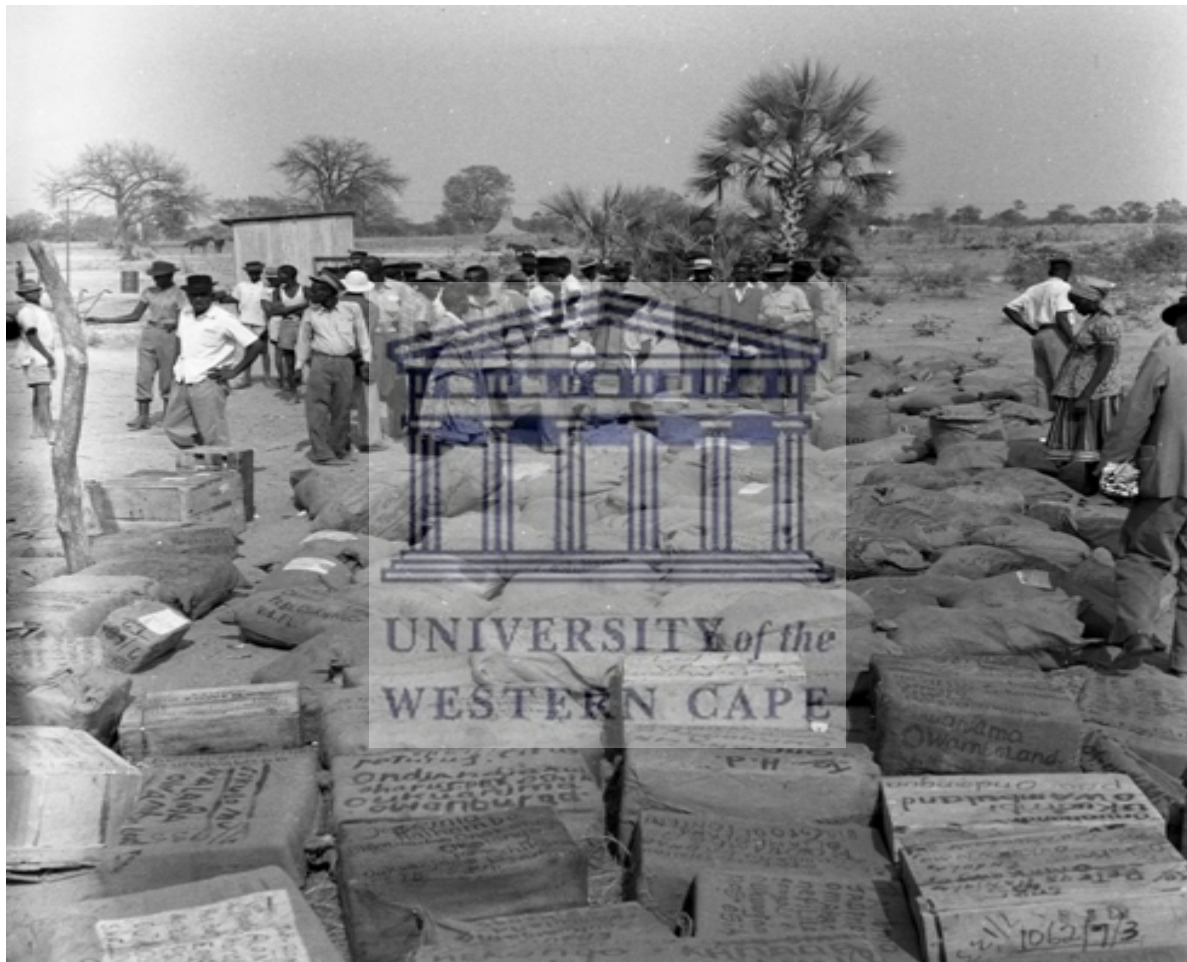


Figure 16: Parcels awaiting delivery at the tribal depot, Oshikango, Native Commissioner Office in Ohangwena Region, Namibia, September 1954. Note the small shelter on the background that I argue was used as an office. Source of image: Dr. Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo Collection, University of Johannesburg Digitised Archive.

<sup>507</sup> NAO, Annual Reports, Quarterly Reports of April – September 1947; Annual Reports of 1953.

The above picture of dumped parcels in the open is said to be similar to that of Ondangwa goods shed. Remitted parcels were at risk, as can be seen they were exposed to all kinds of weather as well as theft, especially at night.<sup>508</sup> To curb theft at Ondangwa goods shed, the government addressed such issues by giving native interpreters<sup>509</sup> the task to guard the place at night.<sup>510</sup> The correspondence does not state whether the guards were remunerated for that extra duty or not.

Apart from such setbacks, there are reports that railway motor drivers were generally unprofessional in their handling of goods that labourers remitted north. Their unethical attitude was confirmed in the NC's correspondence of 18 October 1948 where he reports to the Administrator's Office in Windhoek that during his absence,<sup>511</sup> the railway authorities removed the shelter which the system manager had allowed to remain at Ondangwa station as a temporary measure.<sup>512</sup> The report of April to September 1948 also indicates that the railway authorities had been behaving as they pleased; this is supported by the note stating railway motor drivers sometimes re-erected the shed that they had illegally removed at Ondangwa.<sup>513</sup> The reports of July to September 1950 again state that Railway bus drivers dumped several hundred natives' packages in the open at Ondangwa.<sup>514</sup> My conclusion is that such conduct led to the suspension of the Railway Motor Services in Ovamboland in 1950.<sup>515</sup>

Around 1949, the motor truck meant for the 'Ovamboland Mail Service'<sup>516</sup> started delivering mails and parcels to Ombalantu, the period that Vendelinus Kashindi from Ehungaelo in

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<sup>508</sup> NAO, Annual Reports of January to March 1947; Annual Reports of 1953; interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>509</sup> These interpreters had trouble finding accommodation in homesteads in the surrounding areas.

<sup>510</sup> NAO, Quarterly Report, April – September 1947; Annual Reports 1947-1953.

<sup>511</sup> Unfortunately, the date the Commissioner was absent not provided.

<sup>512</sup> NAO, Annual Reports 1947-1953.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, Quarterly Report: July-September 1950.

<sup>515</sup> Native Affairs Ovamboland, Quarterly Report: July – September 1951.

<sup>516</sup> NAO, Annual Reports 1947-1953.

Ombalantu says marked the beginning of goods shed services in that area.<sup>517</sup> Kashindi argues that the way in which the goods shed at Outapi, Ombalantu operated was a bit different from how goods sheds in Ohangwena and Ondangwa functioned. While at these latter centres open spaces were turned into ‘infrastructure’ where beneficiaries collected their remitted goods, at Outapi at least the remitted goods were cared for. At the beginning of the goods shed service, hardware and related equipment were kept outside, while goods in cartons were stored in what served as an administrative office that was constructed early in the 1930s.<sup>518</sup> This office was a hut 18 feet in diameter and a lavatory, both constructed by staff members with earthen bricks and thatched with local grass.<sup>519</sup>

Kashindi recounts further that as the number of remitted goods increased the space became limited, and some remitted items were left lying outside exposed to the sun or rain. The complaints about spoiled things received at Outapi goods shed were brought before the Ombalantu Council of Headmen who decided to negotiate with Nakafingo Ihalwa<sup>520</sup> to allow them to turn a baobab tree (*omukwa*) in his field into a goods storage shed. Oral history suggests that the trunk of such *omukwa* trees has a hole that runs from the top down into the interior of the tree and these have served as shelter for women, children and old people during local and cattle raiding wars. Kashindi recounts that the Headmen’s Council contracted Benjamin Kashongwa from Omukoko, Ombalantu to find a cave by cutting open part of the baobab trunk on its eastern side and fixing a lockable wooden door there as well.<sup>521</sup> Kashindi remembers Petrus Salom and Silas Temba<sup>522</sup> as having worked at the goods

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid.

<sup>518</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>519</sup> NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V4, Annual Report: 1931.

<sup>520</sup> Nakafingo Ihalwa was the current occupant of the mahangu field where a baobab tree sited, that turned into goods shed.

<sup>521</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; unrecorded conversations with Elifas Ekandjo 27.08.2017 Outapi, Ombalantu; Anna Silas Temba, 21.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu.

<sup>522</sup> NAO, Annual Reports 1947-1953; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.



shed (*ongushe*). Anna Temba<sup>523</sup> relates that beneficiaries who used to tramp to Ondangwa had their distance cut short as they started collecting their remitted goods at the *omukwa* in Ombalantu. She says many of the recipients were from Onaame handiya, Onamanape, Ondeikela, Ohakuyela wards bordering Ombandja in Angola.<sup>524</sup>



Figure 17: The colonial administration centre at Ombalantu, Omusati Region, Ovamboland, Namibia, September 1954. Oral history suggests that the hut pictured in the background served as an office and storage

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<sup>523</sup> Anna (a seventy-one years of age), a daughter to Silas Temba says at the age of seventeen (before his first *okaholo*), her father started working as a cleaner (part time) at Outapi government station; due to good service he rendered the Ombalantu Headmen Council they decided to permanently recruit him. Temba used to receive and issue remitted items at *omukwa*, and the work was remunerated with one cow at the end of the year. Anna clarifies that the Council of Headmen members who earned cattle from charging the subjects that committed crimes, rotated in paying her father. Unrecorded conversation with Anna Silas Temba, 21.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu. (NANFNAO, 9, 11/1V5, Monthly Report, February 1932; NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V7, Annual Report 1934 supports Anna's account and reveals a number of full-grown beasts came from fines people paid in Ombalantu when they illegally cut down trees during the period when Kaimbi Mundjele was Senior Headman.

<sup>524</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Anna Silas Temba, 21.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu; NANFNAO, 9, 11/V4, Annual Report, 1931.

where remitted goods that could go spoiled were stored. Colonial officials also used the space at the centre to hold meetings in the kingdom to discuss issues of colonial governance. Source of image: Dr. Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo Collection, University of Johannesburg Digitised Archive.

Because there were not many options for communicating with the sending area, the situation forced the remitters to write a letter home stating what those at home were to expect, or how to approach the relevant person to assist with the collection of goods from the centre. The envoys could also present letters when following up at the administrative centres when the goods they were entrusted to collect took long to arrive, as the process used to be slow.<sup>525</sup>

Mail from the south also carried instructions stating what and how to use what was remitted, this meant there were restrictions on the goods. Interviewees state that large amounts of money were sent home to be expended on basic needs meant to uplift the livelihoods and standard of living of the receiving households, which included purchasing food, livestock, ploughs and so forth. Some money was sent home for safekeeping (*i tuvikilwe/tsilikwe*), to buy clothes, bicycles, pay debts and so forth.<sup>526</sup>

Formal as well as informal channels experienced several kinds of holdup that affected those involved. Interlocutors recall that although beneficiaries of those who employed informal networks waited for messengers to deliver their remitted stuffs to their homesteads,<sup>527</sup> risks were involved as sometimes these envoys failed to convey parcels to the intended recipients.<sup>528</sup> If this occurred and went unresolved until the courier's death, his family ended

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<sup>525</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9, Complaints, cases, enquiries and disputes (outside Ovamboland, Part I, 1939 - 1946).

<sup>526</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/IV4, Labour recruiting 1920-1941; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalantu; interview with Tobias Amupala, 18.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu and unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>527</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu; interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi; interview with Israel Shingenge, 18.05.2016, Oshimanya, Ongandjera; interview with Bathoromeus Amulungu, 21.08.2016, Ohauhwe, Ombalantu; interview with Tobias Amupala, 18.08.2017, Outapi, Ombalantu and unrecorded conversation with Junias Ndakola, 08.02.2017, Othika, Uukwambi.

<sup>528</sup> Gordon, *Mines, Masters and Migrants*, p 216.

up paying for the ‘crime’ he committed (*shaashi aniwa iikolo ihai olele kezimo*).<sup>529</sup> This is backed up by an account of Gideon Shihepo who in 1928/9 worked with Moses Iithete at Luderitz. After his contract, he sent him to deliver £3 cash to his family, which Moses failed to do. Moses in the meantime died and Gideon approached Moses’ uncle to claim a refund. The NC’s office intervened in the matter at the request of the Luderitz magistrate to get a statement from Christian Nakangwe of Luderitz (formerly worked at the Schulheim and for Dr. Hirsekom), who according to Gideon had witnessed the handing over of the money to Moses.<sup>530</sup>

Interviewees affirm that apart from traveling distances to collect remitted goods at administrative centres after receiving a receipt from the Native Commissioner’s office sent through their ward headmen, those who employed these formal channels also experienced setbacks. Holdups in the formal network involved inconvenience or delays in receiving parcels,<sup>531</sup> or remitted goods went missing and were never recovered.<sup>532</sup> David Silvanus and Vendelinus Kashindi commented on the issue that caused parcels’ disappearance. The two explain that in some cases the remitters placed nametags on the boxes and if they happened to fall off then that would make it very difficult to identify to whom the parcel belonged, thus in most cases those parcels never reached their destination. Speaking from experience, Kashindi who once remitted a package from Pretoria in South Africa when he was in the army during World War II, says to avoid things going missing, he wrote the beneficiary’s details with a permanent marker pen on the box he remitted (having derived it from the original receipt).<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>529</sup> Nampala, ‘Christianization and Cultural Change’, p 58.

<sup>530</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3, Enquiries, Complaints General Part II, 1930-1933/4.

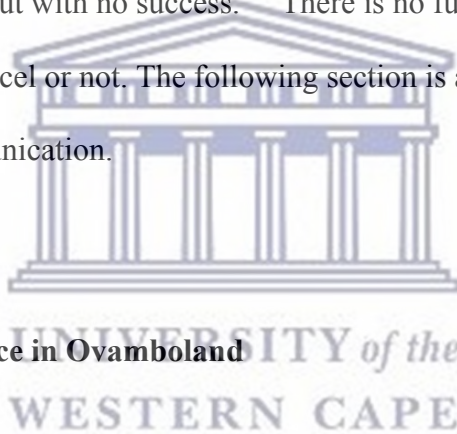
<sup>531</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9, Complaints, Cases, Enquiries and Disputes (outside Ovamboland, Part I, 1939 - 1946).

<sup>532</sup> Interview with David Silvanus, 06.01.2013, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>533</sup> The only proof was kept by the sender, and the remitter jotted down particulars on the letter that the messenger would take to Ondangwa when collecting or querying the arrival of the goods.

About the inconvenience of the formal network, he certifies that the parcel he remitted in September 1943 only reached Ondangwa at the end of March 1944.<sup>534</sup>

Apart from Kashindi's story, the file of complaints, cases, enquiries and disputes states that Jesaya Ingula of Olunkono, Ondangwa, visited the NC's office in Ondangwa on 5 November 1945 to check the status of his personal box, receipt no. V. 817094 (sent by rail from the coast, date not given), marked "Swakopmund 1082". He again went back on 7 Feb 1946, 9 March 1946 and on 29 March 1946, and it had not yet arrived. The file further states that with every visit by Ingula, the Native Commissioner liaised in writing with the Station Master, South Africa Railway & Harbours (SAH&R), Tsumeb requesting him to inform on the development of the parcel, but with no success.<sup>535</sup> There is no further information whether Ingula eventually got his parcel or not. The following section is about another facility which served as a means of communication.



### **Early days of the Post Office in Ovamboland**

Amongst the Ovambo kingdoms, the Ndonga community was the first to be accustomed to the postal mail service, says seventy-seven year-old Boas Mweendeleli. He argues further that Finnish missionaries who settled in the Onayena area in the 1870s before moving to other parts of the kingdom employed his father Petrus Mweendeleli and David Iimene (both former learners at Onayena Mission School) to deliver and collect their mails to and from Outjo (in the Police Zone). Boas Mweendeleli says that those workers were remunerated with a loincloth and during drought periods, they were issued with mahangu (millet) grain, usually

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<sup>534</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>535</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9, Complaints, Cases, Enquiries and Disputes (outside Ovamboland, Part I, 1939 - 1946); interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

done at end of the year.<sup>536</sup> There is an archive that confirms the practice of missionaries sending local Africans south for their mail.<sup>537</sup> For reasons beyond the mail runners' control, recipients often had to wait long periods for their mail, sometimes three months or more. The one thousand kilometers distance between Ovamboland and Outjo that mail runners traveled by wagon contributed to the mail delivery delay, an issue that Peltola also confirms.<sup>538</sup> Mweendeleli relates further that the route to the south was not only long and slow, but dangerous too. There were lions present, which made the mail carriers carry guns.<sup>539</sup> Mweendeleli's argument is backed by Peltola's account when he states that in mid-February 1875, lions attacked and killed one of Rautanen's cows when he and his family were traveling by ox-wagon to buy supplies in Hereroland to the south.<sup>540</sup>

Missionaries who had been in charge of the mail services for almost four decades lost this privilege to the South African administration after they occupied the region in 1915. Numerous motives prompted the government to want to censor the letters of the European missionary societies in Ovamboland. The administration wanted to censor the mail of some of the Finnish Mission people of Russian origin who had shown sympathy towards the Germans, as well as to investigate the issue of missionaries who were writing to Germans in the Protectorate in the Ovambo language. There was another case that the Resident Commissioner of Ovamboland noted concerning the Germans in Outjo district skirting this

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<sup>536</sup> Mweendeleli who followed in his father's footsteps reveals that since 9 July 1964 he worked as a postal assistant in Ondangwa Post Office, and after some years was promoted to a clerk position.

<sup>537</sup> M. Peltola, *Nakambale: The life of Dr. Martin Rautanen* (Helsinki: FELM, 2002), p 79; Hayes, 'History of the Ovambo', p 152; H. Tonjes, *Ovamboland: Country, People, Mission with Particular Reference to the Largest Tribe, The Kwanyama* (Windhoek: Namibia Scientific Society, 1996), p 224; Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 74; NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V3, Monthly report: April 1930. In an unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.02.2017, Omuhozi, Ondonga, he says the loincloth used to be sewn together to make clothes for family members.

<sup>538</sup> Peltola, *Nakambale*, p 79.

<sup>539</sup> Unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.02.2017, Omuhozi, Ondonga.

<sup>540</sup> Peltola, *Nakambale*, p 78.

mail expurgation, as they were sending letters through to Ovamboland by other means than the regular post.<sup>541</sup>

Like missionaries, the colonial administration was also restricted to communication through the mail service only. The Resident Commissioner (RC), Ondonga, Ovamboland suggests on 18 July 1918 that the Protectorate and Ovamboland should be linked by the Department of Posts and Telegraphs as by this time his office had no means of communication with the south to report on any trouble that might arise in Ovamboland.<sup>542</sup> The Director of Posts and Telegraphs instantly considered the RC's requisition by approving a mail service called the Ovamboland Administration Mail, that would mark the colonial administration postal services to the region. The mails were conveyed from Namutoni to Ovamboland by camels,<sup>543</sup> and later by teams of oxen.<sup>544</sup>

Archives records state that the mail conveyance to Ovamboland went through several stages, it started running once a fortnight and some time later it collected and delivered in four full days if not a week.<sup>545</sup> Those that benefited from the cited mail services were missionaries, and South African government representatives at Ondangwa and Namakunde stations (which included mail for the Portuguese based in Angola).<sup>546</sup>

Mailbag transfers that used to take place between Otjikoto, Namutoni and Ngwali were alleged to have contributed to the arrival of mail in a very serious battered condition. The file 'Postal Matters' states that at the beginning, letters and packages were never carried

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<sup>541</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 7, Postal matters 1916-1918.

<sup>542</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 7, Postal matters 1916-1918; Native Affairs Ovamboland, Annual report, August 1928.

<sup>543</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 6; 7, Postal matters 1916-1918. There is a comprehensive account of the fight between South Africa armed forces and Kwanyama combatants which brought the Kwanyama kingship under King Mandume Ndemufayo to an end, by Shiweda, 'Omhedhi: Displacement and Legitimacy', pp 1-26; See also, RCO, Postal matters 1916-1917.

<sup>544</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 7, Postal matters 1916-1918.

<sup>545</sup> NANFNAO, 5, 2/1V5, Labour recruitment 1942-1944.

<sup>546</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 7, Postal matters 1916-1918.

separately, but all thrown in one mailbag, which caused the wrapping of parcels and contents to scatter amongst the letters,<sup>547</sup> making it difficult to sort out the mail correctly. To prevent damage to mail in transit, R. Dickman (Postal Agent for Ovamboland in 1916-18) who was also involved in trying to improve the way the mail was carried proposed that the postmaster put letters and parcel bills carefully packed in one bag, and packages in the other. He again suggests that additional paper or sacking wrappers should cover all bundles within the bags.<sup>548</sup>

Ovamboland mail administration also suffered delays in its delivery caused by different circumstances such as the camels getting sick or lame on the road, the camel men being taken ill, as well as road problems during the rainy seasons.<sup>549</sup> To sort out mail delays problems, the administration suggested that the two camels that were able to carry ordinary letter mail together with 'camel boys' were to be sent on each trip.<sup>550</sup> Since the RC had been at the forefront of wanting to see improvement in the mail conveyance, he wrote to the Secretary for the Protectorate of SWA in Windhoek on 27 November 1917 to propose the substitution of camels and nine camel men<sup>551</sup> with 'native runners'. The administration suggested this because it wanted to cut the costs of feeding camels and their riders.<sup>552</sup> At one point, the RC again suggested lessening expenditure by employing people at intervals, if not full time, to drive a light wagon and span of donkeys, which he argued needed no maintenance.<sup>553</sup> Although the RC proposed mail transportation by donkey to and from Ovamboland, there is no correspondence to show whether such an idea took off or not.

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<sup>547</sup> Ibid; places where the transfer of mail used to take place were located between Tsumeb and Ondonga kingdom.

<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Ibid.

<sup>550</sup> Ibid; NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V7, Monthly and Annual report: January 1934.

<sup>551</sup> These were mail carriers at the time between the south and Ovamboland.

<sup>552</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 7, Postal matters 1916-1918.

<sup>553</sup> Resident Commissioner Ovamboland, RCO, 7, Postal matters 1916-1918.

The government never stopped trying to improve the mail conveyance. Although the Chamber of Mines in Luderitz stated that in 1930 the Ondonga Trading Company would take over the Postal Agency from the Native Commissioner's Office, it reported that up to 1935 the mail service was still in the hands of the administration. This is backed up by the agreement that Mr. Tietz entered into with the administration from 1 April 1935 to collect and deliver Ovamboland mail to and from Tsumeb.<sup>554</sup> In 1940, the Railway Motors Services replaced Tietz.<sup>555</sup> Overall, both kinds of transport employed in mail conveyance greatly suffered delays during the rainy season.<sup>556</sup> The next section is about how the Railway Motors Services dealt with the Ovamboland mail.

### **Ovambo communities and postal services**

The colonial administration in Ovamboland that urged it should be linked with the southern part of the country in 1918 via the Directorate of Posts and Telegraphs was the same institution that officially redirected postal services facility to the Ovamboland community in the 1940s, after realizing the need to communicate with those working in the Police Zone.<sup>557</sup>

As was the case with mail delivery during animal transportation arrangements, the administration continued to organize how mail was to reach different places in Ovamboland. The Director of Posts and Telegrams in Windhoek wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner on 31 December 1947 to argue the necessity of providing better delivery arrangement for mail addressed to places in Ovamboland. At the time mail delivery was concentrated in

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<sup>554</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 11/1V3, Annual Report, January - April 1930; NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V7, Annual Report, June - July 1935; NANFNAO, 8, 2/5/V1, Native Affairs Transport returning labourers, 1929 – 1943.

<sup>555</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55

<sup>556</sup> NANFNAO, 19, 11/1V7, Annual report, February 1934.

<sup>557</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55; Native Affairs Ovamboland, Annual Report, August 1928. The Directorate of Posts and Telegram failed to produce the exact date when Ovambo people started to use the postal services.



Ondangwa where it was sorted into ‘tribal’ areas, kept until fetched by messengers who conveyed it in mailbags from Ondangwa to different kingdoms over distances of up to 150 miles in a single journey. In far off areas, it said that traditional authorities distributed items to owners.<sup>558</sup>

Although I have not found in any source why and when the government involved different kingdoms in mail delivery and distribution,<sup>559</sup> Boas Mweendeleli and Daniel Shooya affirm that that there was a time when communities collected and posted their letters at the royal courts in kingdoms.<sup>560</sup> Shooya says he remembers the Ndonga man by the name Petrus Mbanza who was responsible for Uukolonkadhi kingdom’s mail.<sup>561</sup> Their version is also supported by the correspondence from the Tribal Secretary, Ongandjera dated 29 October 1952 addressed to the NC (Mr. Eedes) in Ondangwa, informing him that the Ongandjera royal court had handed their mailbag to their ‘native’ runner to deliver it at Ondangwa, which the NC then issued to the Postmaster on 4 November 1952. Although the Tribal Secretary wrote that the headmen were proudly involved in the mail distribution exercise, he failed to state whether such activity involved payments or were carried out voluntarily.<sup>562</sup>

If it is not clear why the administration involved the kingdoms in postal issues in the first place, it would be equally challenging at this point to ask why it decided to open up postal agencies at certain mission stations. On 5 December 1947, the Postmaster proposed four ‘native’ runners to operate between Ondangwa and stations in the northwest at £20 per month; the stations involved were Uukwaluudhi, Ombalantu, Ongandjera and in the absence

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<sup>558</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

<sup>559</sup> Apart from information that the Postal Matters archive file provides about mail delivery, there is no information stating the specific date as well as the motive why the government came into an agreement with kingdoms regarding postal services.

<sup>560</sup> Unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.2.2017, Omuhozi, Ondonga and interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>561</sup> Interview with Daniel Shooya, 15.08.2016, Oshika, Uukolonkadhi.

<sup>562</sup> NAO, Postal matter – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

of a mission station in Uukolonkadhi, the royal court received the mail. At the cited mission stations, missionaries accepted the responsibilities entailed with the delivery and acceptance of letters, registered articles and parcels; they were also supplied with postage stamps.<sup>563</sup>

Below is a photograph by State Ethnologist van Warmelo concerning the mail at Oshikuku mission station in Uukwambi kingdom. In all the readings I consulted I could find no document supporting Warmelo's record of this service. I argue further that the absence of archives stating postal activity in Uukwambi kingdom made me suspect that perhaps the archives only documented kingdoms that the NC's office in Ondangwa piloted sending mail to, and left out those whose postal activity took place later in the 1950s.



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<sup>563</sup> For how postal agencies were expected to function and all arrangements concerning the handling of parcel registration and so forth, see NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.



Figure 18: An Ovambo woman looking through the mail at Oshikuku Mission Station, Omusati Region, Ovamboland, Namibia, September 1954. Source of image: Dr. Nicholas Jacobus van Warmelo Collection, University of Johannesburg Digitised Archive.

Late in 1947, as soon as the colonial administration decided on the matter of conveying mail to local areas, it ensured there were mail runners responsible for carrying mail to mission stations and administration centres. Regardless of such an arrangement, it appears the administration mail received more attention compared to that addressed to ‘tribal’ destinations. The effective and special arrangement that the government had of quickly conveying the official and private mails between Ondangwa and Oshikango Native Affairs Station supports this argument.<sup>564</sup> The NC suggested on 5 December 1947 that two ‘native

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<sup>564</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55; NAO, Annual Reports 1947 – 1954; Quarterly Report, October – December 1952.

runners' carry the administration mails at an amount of £10 per month and again on 15 June 1948 the Commissioner proposed a post of special messengers to carry the mail when the government messengers were not available for that purpose.<sup>565</sup>

Although archives cover all arrangements that the colonial administration put in place regarding how mail was conveyed to and from the mission stations and administrative centres, it failed to document clearly how intended recipients received their mail, an issue oral histories tried to address though in brief. Oral accounts suggest that there were local runners whom the involved parishes tasked to collect mail from mission stations and administrative centres and deliver to them.<sup>566</sup> The NC reports that Uukwanyama (being the largest kingdom in Ovamboland) had a number of local runners who collected mails from the Oshikango administrative centre and carried them to Endola parish (situated forty-eight kilometers away), the Finnish Mission Station at Engela (ten kilometers), and the Anglican Mission Station at Odibo (thirteen point eight kilometers). Congregations such as Onamnamma (thirty-three point one kilometers), Oshandi (forty-three point two kilometers) and Eenhana (fifty-three point three kilometers) also received mail from Oshikango.

The NC's report of 1947 to 1955 states that no mail runners were needed between Ondangwa and Onayena because missionaries from the latter area used to collect such mail from Onandjokwe Mission Station.<sup>567</sup> Information provided by Boas Mweendeleli about the mail stated above contradicts this. Mweendeleli argues that Nikodemus Makambuli from Onayena was responsible for mail collection from Onandjokwe Mission Station and delivered it to

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<sup>565</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

<sup>566</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.1.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; in an unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.02.2017, Omuhosi, Ondonga, he states that local mail runners charged half a penny (which Aawambo called *otiki*) for the letter received. The letter recipient could pay such money upon receipt of the letter and those without cash at hand had their names registered in the book and paid next Sunday. Those fees formed the local mail runners' payments. Interviewees relate further that regular customers usually paid upfront to receive their mails annually.

<sup>567</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

Onayena and Oshigambo parishes.<sup>568</sup> Another mailbag collected from Onandjokwe was for Olukonda parish, which is nine point three kilometers away. Aina Pinehas says Joseph *yoombapila* (Joseph the post man) was in charge of *oontumwafo/eehumwafo* (mail) for Olukonda Parish.<sup>569</sup>

Mweendeleli and Pinehas relate how the two churches in Ondonga that were involved in postal matters issued letters. Interviewees say that on Sundays after church service, the churchgoers gathered under a tree near the church or in the absence of a tree, an open space was used. There the local mail runner read aloud letters one by one, the owners present came forth to collect theirs, while those absent had letters collected by neighbours or those who knew them.<sup>570</sup> It was an honour for a person to collect and carry a letter whether it was his or her own or somebody else's, say the interlocutors. To avoid dirtying letters with red ochre (*oonkula*) which by then was applied by many as a body lotion, Aawambo instituted a custom of carrying letters on a sorghum stalks. People did not have to carry a stalk from home, but they drew them from the church building roofs, which at the time were thatched with a mixture of sorghum stalks and local grass.<sup>571</sup>

As part of improving the delivery of mail to places in Ovamboland, the government drew up two proposals in the early months of 1948. The NC in Ondangwa proposed the conveying of mailbags by bicycle, but the plan was abandoned owing to the harsh weather, which did not

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<sup>568</sup> Unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.02.2017, Omuhozi, Ondonga. Onayena congregation is sited twenty-four kilometers while Oshigambo is nineteen point three kilometers away from Onandjokwe hospital.

<sup>569</sup> Aina Pinehas from Onkondjelo ward, Olukonda relates that Aawambo refer to the letter as *ontumwafo* in Oshindonga, which the Oshikwanyama-speaking call *onhumwafo*, and this is purposefully used in delivering messages to recipients. The letter is also referred to as *omukanda*, or *ombapila* taken from the English word paper on which the message is written. Pinehas says further that the man responsible for issuing out letters at Olukonda congregation was commonly known by the name Joseph *yoombapila*, literally meant Joseph 'the postman.' Onayena is sited east of Onandjokwe Mission Station, while Olukonda is situated south of the mission. Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga.

<sup>570</sup> Those who assisted others with letter collection traveled distances to deliver the letters to their homesteads, as in some cases those who collected them were from different wards from that of the owner.

<sup>571</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga and unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.02.2017, Omuhozi, Ondonga.

favour bicycle transport. The Department of Posts and Telegram at Ondangwa suggested employing motor transport, which became a reality when the Postal Department in Windhoek on an unspecified date in 1949 sent up the lorry to Ondangwa meant for the Ovamboland Mail Services. Acting NC K. R. Crossman<sup>572</sup> asserted on 11 April 1949 that up to the time of writing the stated truck was not yet operational, but still parked in its garage for reasons unknown. Even though it was believed that a motor vehicle would bring an improvement in the conveyance of mail, the administration, knowing the geography of the region very well, vowed not to do away with the ‘native runners’ because they would obviously need them during January-March (the rainy months) when roads were impassable by motor cars.<sup>573</sup>

On 16 August 1949, the NC of Ovamboland wrote to the Chief Native Commissioner in Windhoek informing him that he undertook to operate the transport section of the Ovamboland Mail Service, with Johannes Shekudja Nambahu as driver. Nambahu agreed to be the postal vehicle driver on 7 December 1948.<sup>574</sup> The postal vehicle carried mail to various points once a fortnight. On these trips, the driver was usually escorted by Zacharias Johannes and Shongola Jacob who were there to assist during any motor breakdown and when stuck in the sand,<sup>575</sup> as roads were rudimentary.

Mweendeleli recounts that one day in Omaalala ward, the mail vehicle returning from the Western kingdoms stopped under a mopane tree. Those who spotted the car arrived to lend a helping hand, but the postal workers told them that they were not stuck (because the road was very bad), but resting after a long trip from collecting and delivering the mail in the Western kingdoms. After being told this, they then asked postal workers if next time they could post

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<sup>572</sup> Acting Native Commissioner, Ondangwa, Ovamboland at the time.

<sup>573</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55; NAO, Annual Reports 1947-1953; October 1948; Report for quarter ended 31 March 1949.

<sup>574</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55. The salary stood at £84 x 12-120 plus cost of living allowance, which was £36 per annum for single persons and £72 for married persons.

<sup>575</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

their letters directly with them. The mail carriers took this up with the administration, which considered it favourably by erecting a post office box under that tree. The community and perhaps people from the neighbouring area started posting their letters there and because of the postal activity that was taking place under that mopane, it made people name that tree the *Omusati gwopoosa*.<sup>576</sup> It is unknown whether there are other places somewhere in the region that served a similar purpose to that of the *Omusati gwopoosa*.

An article entitled 'Metropolitan Post Offices: The Chief Office, London' which is about postal services is very relevant to one part of this study. It reveals that there was a Department for a 'Blind Clerk' in the main London post office instituted to effectively sort out badly directed letters.<sup>577</sup> For an institution to introduce such a unit suggests it might have experienced challenges in regard to sorting out its mail, which interested me to the extent of deciding to query how the Ovamboland Mail Services sorted out its mail.<sup>578</sup> Reading this article as well as the Namibian archives on postal offices led me to conclude that the two institutions (Ovamboland Mail Services and the London Metropolitan Post Office) shared a common challenge of customers posting letters to friends or relatives and enclosing solid goods. Some of the letters received at the London post office had in them specimens of gloves, boots, and samples of tea and various seeds,<sup>579</sup> while items like rings, coins, pins, handkerchiefs and so forth were contained in letters posted through the Ovamboland mail. The correspondence dated 9 June 1948, addressed to Master (Nakale) Eedes in Ondangwa

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<sup>576</sup> Such a tree was situated some few meters north of the B1 road situated fourteen kilometers from Ondangwa. Unrecorded interview with Boas Mweendeleli, 06.02.2016; 06.2.2017, Omuhozi, Ondonga.

<sup>577</sup> The blind clerk was a man with all his senses in perfect order who dealt with badly directed letters, mails that were written in unknown languages, and letters posted without surnames and/or without postal or physical address. The clerk sorted these using books like the 'Directories and Guides.' See 'Metropolitan Post Offices: The Chief Office, London' in *The Illustrated Magazine of Art*, Vol. 1. No.6, 1853, p 330.

<sup>578</sup> In an interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu, he says that badly directed letters were never experienced in the Ovamboland mail service, as illiterates used to approach the lettered people to assist them with letter writing. The Blind Clerk was not necessary here because literates used to write letters directing them to the recipient's name, with his or her physical or postal address, and in the case of those in Ovamboland, the person's ward, parish and kingdom were indicated on the envelope.

<sup>579</sup> 'Metropolitan Post Offices: The Chief Office,' p 331.

from Kaimbi Mundjele (a headman from Ombalantu) backs up this point. In that communique Mundjele requested Nakale to inform Ovambo workers in the south to stop forwarding letters enclosing the above cited items, because envelopes might be torn in the transportation process and recipients might find the articles then missing from their envelopes.<sup>580</sup> The stated challenges were not the only difficulties the Ovamboland Mail Services experienced. Around August 1948, an Ovambo labourer sent an unusual item through the post office. This angered the NC in Ondangwa H.L.Eedes and forced him to write to the Chief Native Commissioner (CNC) in Windhoek on 30 August 1948, complaining about the mutilation and spoiling of the post in the Ovamboland mail. He points out that many parcels, letters, books and so forth were spoiled by red ochre, and resident Europeans fear having valuable parcels sent in the 'Ovamboland mail'. As Eedes was much disappointed, he forwarded to CNC a private parcel, addressed to him from Windhoek, covered in red ochre, arguing that the clothing contained in the parcel was seriously damaged, if not completely ruined.<sup>581</sup>

Contemporary technology did not only bring goodness with it, but inadvertently landed some of its users in trouble. Placing defaced postage stamps on letters posted through the post office was an offence and the law imposed a fine up to a maximum of £50, which later after the administration realized that people implicated in it did it out of ignorance, reduced to a nominal fine of £1/10. This fixed fee was usually collected from the culprits with the assistance of the Native Commissioner, Ondangwa office.<sup>582</sup>

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<sup>580</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

<sup>581</sup> NAO, 10/1, Postal matters – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

<sup>582</sup> NAO, Postal matter – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55. The administration created an awareness through local authorities, mission schools as well as churches to inform and caution communities to stop using defaced postage stamps. Since that attempt failed, the Postmaster was forced to conduct an investigation, which revealed that people used those spoiled postage stamps 'due to ignorance'.



Around April to May 1954, Helena Fanuela from Ombuga, Omulilo parish, Ondonga and Toini Petelus, 'kraal': Kapia, headman: Hirokera, Ondangwa' were found guilty of sending a used stamped addressed envelope and fined £1/10. In a similar case, the Assistant Native Commissioner in the Oshikango office summoned Elizabeth Jacob for cross-examination on the usage of an impaired stamp issued. After thorough questioning, Elizabeth declared that she used a stamped addressed envelope received from the south.<sup>583</sup> After such clarity the Assistant Commissioner gave her a strong warning and advised her that he would recommend that no further action be taken against her, as she walked about 30 miles (for a single journey) with a baby on her back.<sup>584</sup> I argue that the fact that the administrative official at Oshikango did not fine Jacob, as had happened to Fanuela and Petelus, indicates that he had a heart.



### **Who writes or reads *oontumwafu*?**

Voipio as well as Berger and Mohr relate that when people on labour contracts who were illiterate wanted to communicate with their loved ones, they sought for letter writing and reading assistance from the literate.<sup>585</sup> In the case of South Africa, Breckenridge argues that the latter acquired limited literacy from the mission education they had acquired.<sup>586</sup> However,

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<sup>583</sup> According to Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and unrecorded conversation with Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama, those who wrote letters north usually enclosed addressed envelopes in their mail, to try to address the dearth of stationery and other related materials which Kashindi and Nakale confirmed were experienced in far off areas during contract labour time. Through trying to address that problem, some people out of ignorance ended up placing invalid stamps on envelopes. See also Harries, *Work, Culture and Identity*, p 176 about the scarcity of stationery in rural areas of Mozambique.

<sup>584</sup> NAO, Postal matter – General, 10/2/47 – 8/9/55.

<sup>585</sup> J. Berger and J. Mohr, *A seventh man, The story of a migrant worker in Europe* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975), p 208; Voipio, 'Contract work through Ovambo eyes', p 116.

<sup>586</sup> NAO, 18, 11/1V1, Annual reports 1924 – 1928 states that mission schools in Ovamboland had been running a Biblical-oriented curriculum taught in vernacular languages and through that people learnt how to read and write in their mother tongue. An example is Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 50 who confirms having attended a mission school at Engela and while on contract, he had been communicating with home through letter writing using the knowledge he acquired from the school he attended. See also K. Breckenridge, 'Love Letters and Amanuenses: Beginning the Cultural History of the Working Class Private Sphere in Southern Africa, 1900-1933', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 26, Number 2, June 2000, p 345. Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; unrecorded conversations with Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama; Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu; unrecorded

regardless of the level or quality of education that those assisting with letter writing received, it emerges clearly that the Ovamboland Mail Service did not experience trouble with directing letters, as for instance the London Post Office did.<sup>587</sup>

The post office, which was primarily directed towards contract workers in the south to communicate with the sending area, purposefully benefited those who engaged it, although it is argued that sometimes things did not work out as planned. In October 1943, Josef Kalepo (Identification Pass No. 79176) gave his employer Mr. S.W. J. van der Merwe of Marine farm a parcel and the amount of £1.10 to send to his sister Toini in Ovamboland. Toini told her brother after his contract ended that she only received the parcel and not the money. Kalepo launched a complaint (No. 2/9/2) requesting the Gobabis Magistrate to investigate what mode Van der Merwe used to send the money. On 17 July 1944, the Gobabis Magistrate responded through the Native Commissioner in Ondangwa that Van der Merwe alleges that he took out a postal order and dispatched it to Toini, together with the parcel.<sup>588</sup> No further information was provided as to whether in the end Kalepo recovered his money or not. Voipio earlier argued that during the Namibian contract labour system letters were hard to write;<sup>589</sup> her argument interested me to the extent that I decide to inquire into how members of the unlearned Ovawambo community on contract and in the sending area found amanuenses who assisted them with reading and writing letters. Interlocutors argue that it was a hard task to find a trustworthy amanuensis on one's own, because it meant a person one can trust with confidential information (*e na ontulo*). Interviewees however say the fortunate unschooled never struggled to find assistants, as their fellows referred them to those whose

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conversation with Oscar Shimanya, 13, 29.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama and interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama.

<sup>587</sup> Voipio, 'Contract work through Ovambo eyes', p 116 states that letters were the only mode of communication at the time.

<sup>588</sup> NANFNAO, 8, 2/3V9, Complaints, Cases, Enquiries and Disputes (outside Ovamboland, Part I, 1939 - 1946).

<sup>589</sup> Voipio, 'Contract work through Ovambo eyes', p 116.

services they used. The less fortunate required time to secretly study the behaviour of the amanuensis concerned and only approached them when satisfied.<sup>590</sup>

Interviewees say amanuenses ranged from a trusted stranger, a friend, a relative or neighbour who, when they agreed to assist, pledged that he or she would keep the letter's deliberations private, though participants say some never kept their word.<sup>591</sup> Josaphat Shanghala says that his clients, when they wanted to make use of his services, asked when he would be free. The two would go to a quiet place (*pehala lyi iyepa*) on an agreed date and time, where the illiterate person handed him a letter (*e mu talele mo mombapila ye*). If reading was the assistance sought for, Shanghala explains that after opening the letter he first read the content silently, as the way of preparing himself to find appropriate words as some letters bring complicated news. The amanuensis then presents the message twice (in a summary form) to the assisted person who listens attentively, and when it is his moment to recite the content, he tells it the way he mastered it.<sup>592</sup> It usually took the assisted person days to think about the letter's content read to him, before approaching the amanuensis to help with responding to the letter (*a shunithe ko komukanda*).<sup>593</sup> During the replying session, the assistant listened and

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<sup>590</sup> Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; unrecorded conversations with Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama; Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu; unrecorded conversation with Oscar Shimanya, 13, 29.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama and interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama.

<sup>591</sup> Voipio, 'Contract work through Ovambo eyes', pp 115-116; Breckenridge, 'Love Letters and Amanuenses', p 345. Interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; unrecorded conversations with Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama; Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu; unrecorded conversation with Oscar Shimanya, 13, 29.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama and interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama.

<sup>592</sup> Josaphat Shanghala, former Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, recounts that he conducted spiritual duties including christening, confirmation as well as assisting workers on contract with reading and replying to letters. He says he carried out such services while serving on the Urban Industrial Mission, first at Western Deep Level mine in Johannesburg, South Africa in 1972 and secondly in 1973, at CDM (Oranjemund), Namibia. Unrecorded conversations with Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu.

<sup>593</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; unrecorded conversations with Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama; Oscar Shimanya, 13, 29.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama and interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama.

recited the message as told to him, which he at the end concisely summed up to fit on the writing slate or *okabloka* as Aawambo called it.<sup>594</sup>

As earlier stated, it was hard to trust a stranger with one's private life, and Shanghala supports this argument. He says a new contract worker approached him one day seeking for letter writing assistance, which he offered. The assisted person requested him not to seal the envelope after he was done with the writing. Shanghala relates further that later in the day the man he helped returned, telling him that he trusted him and would be using his services. Shanghala explains that such a stranger tested his service by taking the letter to a second person to check if (he) Shanghala had written exactly what he was told, which ended up to be the case.<sup>595</sup>

It must be emphasised that being illiterate did not mean a person was stupid, and this is shown by how the unlearned community skillfully employed proverbs, idioms, figures of speech (*nkene ya li haa kumbike*) when conveying their messages. They engaged the language's deeper concepts with the intention of hindering the person aiding them from making sense of the content, as some mail carried sensitive news.

Messages conveyed in letters ranged from wives writing to husbands on contract, communicating their household needs such as money to purchase maize meal to supplement the little mahangu available, as well as clothes, ploughs and so forth. A husband in the south could remit cash home to the wife accompanied by instructions regarding what it should be spent on, while some was sent to a trusted relative or friend for safekeeping (*i ka pungulwe*). Husbands whose wives squandered money (*haa li po/dhanene iimaliwa*) employed the latter.

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<sup>594</sup> Breckenridge, 'Love Letters and Amanuenses', p 347; unrecorded conversation with Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu.

<sup>595</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu.

Some letters carried the pain of betrayal and abandonment caused by prolonged absences of migrant labourers. In cases like that, an elder member of the family would write to a married relative on contract notifying him that his wife got tired of waiting, thus she left the matrimonial house (*omukulukadi a hauluka eumbo*) or she was involved in infidelity (*a tauluka omhango*). The mail could also pass the message that a neighbour (*mushiinda*) whom for instance he entrusted to assist his wife with livestock while on contract (*okwa gwayela megumbo lye*), had become involved in adultery with the wife. Interviewees state that after a concerned man returned from contract, his and the wife's families came together to discuss and decide what would happen to the wife or baby in cases where such relationships resulted in a child.

A husband who left and arrived at his contract workplace may write querying in a way that suggests when he left, the wife was not doing well (*ta pula kutya omukadhi oku li po ngiini*). The wife might reply in depth (*kandi i wete*), meaning she is expecting a baby and in cases where a miscarriage was experienced, she would inform him (*e shi nda popile hasho vali*).<sup>596</sup> When announcing the arrival of newly born baby boy she would pen that (*owa etelwa ko omukwati womafuma*), as well as (*omutsi gwiikwiila*) in the case of a girl.

Unmarried Ovambo men on contract also wrote letters to relatives and family members, young females they were courting (*ya ushikathana* or *yalekathana*) or in search of love (*taa endelathana*). Youths in Ovamboland updated those on contract with the latest news including gossip such as who impregnated who - *olye a teya ngadi/ntumba omagulu/tilehi uusila* - which literally meant who broke whose legs, or who spilled the flour, who broke up with whom (*a hengwa* or *ethwa*) and who married whom and so forth. Sometimes people

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<sup>596</sup> Due to sensitivity of the discussed matter, here the two engaged in-depth phrases.

wrote just passing their regards (*taa talelathana po*),<sup>597</sup> delivering news of bereavement,<sup>598</sup> querying or informing how the livestock were surviving, or to pass news about drought (*oshikukuta*), flood (*efundja*), or a good harvest (*omuloka muwa*) which the region was experiencing.<sup>599</sup>

The letter writing and reading relationships did not always leave those involved satisfied. Some of the participants argue that some of the amanuenses betrayed the confidence that those they assisted had invested in them, by revealing what they promised to conceal. Kashindi reveals that if for instance a young literate contract worker had a crush on a young woman who is in a relationship with the illiterate person, he might use a chance when assisting with letter writing to alter the content of the letter stating that the person is no longer interested in the relationship. After the twosome broke up, the young woman was free and could accept a love proposal from the man of her choice including the deceiver (*omuhongololi*).<sup>600</sup> Oral histories confirm that youths were not the only ones who were cheated, but elders too became victims of those they trusted. Ndesheetelwa Nakale reveals that an unscrupulous literate when assisting an illiterate wife with reading the letter that accompanied by a remitted box might claim a share from what was remitted.<sup>601</sup> I understand that after an illiterate person found out that the assistant had been duping him or her, they obviously ended the service and started searching for a new person to assist them. Unfortunately, no single letter from such a period has survived.

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<sup>597</sup> Unrecorded conversations with Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu; Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga; interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama.

<sup>598</sup> Ndadi, *Breaking Contract*, p 50.

<sup>599</sup> Unrecorded conversations with Josaphat Shanghala, 13.08.2016, Anamulenge, Ombalantu; Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama; interview with Aina Pinehas, 24.01.2016, Onambango, Ondonga, interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu and interview with Martha Nandjebo, 02.01.2016, Ohongo, Uukwanyama.

<sup>600</sup> Interview with Vendelinus Kashindi, 15-16.05.2016, Ehungaelo, Ombalantu.

<sup>601</sup> Unrecorded conversation with Ndesheetelwa Nakale, 31.12.2015, Olyavahenge, Uukwanyama.

## Conclusion

This chapter reveals that after conquering the territory, South African colonial administration instituted numerous facilities meant to benefit both the government and settler economy. At different periods the government implicitly decided to redirect certain of its services into the contract labour system to increase their control over the lives of contract workers at the same time as they ‘bettered’ their position. I argue that the administration readdressed its postal and remittance services to the migrant labour community after realizing the dearth of communication with their families in the sending area. The stated facilities kept and benefited not only the contract workers but also many of the people in the sending area as well as those living outside the Ovamboland region. Postal services, I argue, greatly benefited the Aawambo community and they eventually adopted this particular mode of infrastructure and made it part of their culture.

Archives give out the positive side of the administration for instance the transport development that it employed to ensure that the stated infrastructures reached or were accessed by beneficiaries at Ondangwa and later at the far-off areas. The archives state further how the administration tried its best to improve mail conveyance, having started from animal transport, then engaging native runners and later with motor vehicles delivering mail to different places in Ovamboland. It also ensured that workers responsible for receiving and issuing the remitted goods at *ongushe* were recruited as well and that to avoid thieving, the goods shed site was guarded at night. In this chapter, I also elaborated how the Native Commissioner played a mediating role between different people who had disagreements over the remittance facility.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has taken us through the ways that Aawambo of northern Namibia embraced into their culture the contract labour project that was instituted in Namibia from the 1880s. The main study stretches from the year 1915 when the Union of South African occupied Ovamboland up to 1954 when the last Native Commissioner for Ovamboland completed his term of office and a new administrative phase began.

During this study, I learned that customarily, Aawambo men used to undertake several kinds of enterprises such as hunting, trading, war and raiding in order to provide for their families as well as to protect their country and that after the introduction of contract labour, they added it to their expeditionary practices.<sup>602</sup> I also learned that before one undertook such an expedition, a related ritual that Aawambo instituted for such occurrences was performed. I again learned that Aawambo who fused the migrant labour project into their lives did not institute new rites for it, but they aligned the new scheme to existing rituals they used to perform when one was going to war or faced tough competition.<sup>603</sup> Rituals conducted for those who undertook such excursions usually involved the ancestors (*aakwampungu*),<sup>604</sup> whom it was believed granted permission or refused the person to undertake such an excursion (through dreams or visions).

Having closely scrutinized rituals that are linked to *aakwampungu*, I argue that these rites were executed to psychologically toughen the mind of the departing person to enable him to

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<sup>602</sup> Aawambo viewed contract labour as very risky and harsh.

<sup>603</sup> Aawambo had much earlier instituted several rituals which they used to perform for every event they undertook. As nobody used to know what was going to happen to the person going to war for example, a rite wishing him to be protected and return home alive used to be performed, which I argue served as a prayer.

<sup>604</sup> The ancestors were believed to be close to God (*Kalunga*) and could easily deliver their prayers to him.



face and accept what the expedition might bring.<sup>605</sup> I argue that this responds to the question many readers have posed as to why Ovambo men continued engaging in the repressive contract labour system.<sup>606</sup>

I also learned that Aawambo who believed that *komeho iha ku tseyika* - meaning 'no one knows how tomorrow would turn out' ensured that from a tender age every parent imparted into young ones those norms which mostly centred on the idea of human-ness (*uuntu*). Those who mastered such teachings portrayed this by treating others the way they would like to be treated.<sup>607</sup> I again argue that the relationship the homestead owners' had with the migrant labour community who passed through their areas, the bond labourers had with one another at work places, as well as the respect they showed towards their masters, reflected that they implemented the informal education passed on to them by their parents.

The findings of this study show that without the weight that women (*aananguwo*) threw behind the project, then it could have collapsed. *Aananguwo* ensured rituals were correctly performed before one departed and while away. There were also some rituals that were conducted upon returning home from contract to check if the returned labourer was the same person as when he left or if there was a change in his conduct, which was referred to as *pamwe oku na shi a guma shaantu*.<sup>608</sup> For any unusual behaviour noticed, which sometimes could be dangerous to others, parents immediately arranged a visit to the herbalist (*ta ye mu fala paantu*) for cleansing before he was integrated back into the wider community.

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<sup>605</sup> Mans, *The changing faces of Aawambo*, p 112; interview with Andreas Muleka, 14.03.2016. Ohaukelo Ondonga.

<sup>606</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo,' p 208; Shiweda, 'Omheddi: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 105.

<sup>607</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', p 21.

<sup>608</sup> Such observation was important as some workers returned home not in a good mental state and could be a danger not only to the family, but also to anybody they met, and to prevent such from occurring that therapeutic consultation was necessary.

Apart from serving as prayers, the labourers' on contract were believed to have employed rites as an encouragement to boldly face hardships that the contract brought. In situations where the migrant labour community had little or no food at all (at the recruitment centre or work), it is said that they spiritually connected with home where they knew there was plenty of food. Aawambo also had a norm of *oku timaumbwilithathana* - keeping others holding on and keeping them going. This was noted in many instances, one of them for example when Amunyela promised some returning workers that on their way back to *okaholo* as prospective recruits they would find food,<sup>609</sup> because at the moment they had run out. Similar incidents were also observed in some homestead owners' replies when they could not afford to feed strangers because they had little food, as well as those that ran out of space to accommodate them (especially when awaiting recruitment). In these instances, strangers were usually advised to check the next houses.<sup>610</sup> When labourers' found themselves in difficult circumstances for instance when they were maltreated, it said that they took courage from an Oshiwambo proverb '*ka pe na shikukutu shi ha hulu, po ka pe na shidhigu monima shaa shuna mpadhi,*' meaning no matter how hard the situation, it would eventually come to an end. This study again brings out that Aawambo tradition did not only prepare people to relate to one another in good times, but it also groomed them to stand by others in difficult times too, such as death. In my earlier work, I argue how the death of an Omuwambo person was handled in general as well as what happened to those who died far from home (though very briefly),<sup>611</sup> which in this instance I connect to the case of Andreas Pinehas who died on contract.

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<sup>609</sup> These prospective recruits were tramping back home on recess.

<sup>610</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 23-24; interview with Isaak Shaanika, 18.05.2016, Okalale, Ongandjera and unrecorded telephonically interview with Amutenya Malakia, 08.09.2018, oNangombe tiikandwa, Uukwambi.

<sup>611</sup> Nampala, 'Christianization and Cultural Change', pp 58-65.

Usually at the deathbed of an Omuwambo person, there was supposed to be someone to ensure the dying person's soul could freely depart to the ancestors' world. That person could be a family member but in the absence of relatives, any Omuwambo person could stand in for the family to perform general death-related rites such as to ensure that the hands of the dying persons were open (*a kamunuka*) and not closed or forming a fist (*a kaminina*). Aawambo believed that failure to conduct such a rite would mean that the world that the dying person was attached to would collapse with him or her.<sup>612</sup> The failure to have such rites performed at Andreas's death was believed to have caused the death of Katrina Amutenja<sup>613</sup> that took place five months later, after the grievous news of the grandson's demise reached home. I conclude that there was a disruption in the deaths of many Aawambo contract labourers especially who died in the absence of fellow Oshiwambo-speaking persons. Other interruptions to such practices that I noted concerned the administrative offices that dealt with the deaths of those who died on contract, and which treated these death cases differently.

On this matter, I argue that cases were handled unevenly because the colonial administration lacked any monitoring. Namhila argues that when it came to carrying out colonial administration policies on how to deal with the deceased's personal effects, officials employed their own discretion where some partially carried out administrative guidelines, while others completely ignored them. The latter kind of officials were said to have destroyed

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<sup>612</sup> In her doctoral work 'Symbolic Power of Kings in Pre-colonial Ovambo Societies', p 298, M. Salokoski talks about the regicide ritual. In an unrecorded conversation with Nahanga Naundobe on 22.01.2020, Onangwe, Ondonga he argues that with the introduction of western hospitals where patients die under medical staff care, the cited ritual would be performed before the burial. Elders in the family prepared mahangu stalks *uuhati / uuhenguti*, which were placed on the right hand of the corpse, which by this time would be closed and forms a fist. The stalks were usually equal to a number of the living people (mostly relatives) that the deceased loved much as well as material one owned such as cattle. The elders open the palm as they removed *okahati / okahenguti* (singular) mentioning the name such stalks represented, and requesting the dead to let the mentioned live and not to take the mentioned with (*ohatu ku kutha ngandi or ntumba ino ya naye*) and the process is done until the last stalk. As they perform this they are requesting the dead to go peacefully (*kutya na ye nombili*). Naundobe continues arguing that Aawambo believed that failure to separate the dead from what he was attached to while alive meant that the latter would also die one by one until the last one.

<sup>613</sup> Amutenja was Andreas Pinehas' grandmother who brought him up since he was two years old until when he went on his second contract where he died.

the deceased's belongings claiming they were of no value, a form of action that left the affected families in a dilemma. According to Oshiwambo custom, anybody who died away from home and his or her family never received their personal effects is not considered dead, but it is believed that one day he or she would show up. This can be interpreted that the relevant families are still left with open chapters and they are finding it hard to find closure.

I learned that to ensure that every member of the Aawambo community mastered the home teachings, in earlier times the elders attached scary consequences to each norm introduced. The concerns groomed community members to be responsible for their own lives and those of others, as well as to sparingly conserve available resources and so forth. Likuwa from Kavango region of Namibia also argues that in the past, young ones from his area did not go against the wishes of the parents, but whatever they decided, that was how it was going to be.<sup>614</sup> For those who got to grips with this kind of education in the past,<sup>615</sup> it ideally benefited them in several ways such as they were taught to whom they could tell their plans, trust, and share their success including their earnings. The custom of contract labourers only entering their parents' homes or homes of their own in the evening when returning from contract (even though one may have arrived in the home vicinity earlier during the day), indicated that labourers of the time were submissive to these observances.

I also learned that youngsters in the past were taught that to prosper in life, one should allow his parents or any elders, most importantly the fathers, to guide him throughout his entire life.<sup>616</sup> Returning labourers from Kavango were said to have been biddable and conducted themselves in the same manner as those from Ovamboland,<sup>617</sup> a point confirmed by an

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<sup>614</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from the Kavango,' p 162.

<sup>615</sup> Such education was informal and those who mastered it evaluated and assessed through the way they conducted themselves with each other.

<sup>616</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi, allowing elders to guide one in life also included that they had control over who was to get what from contract earnings.

<sup>617</sup> Likuwa, 'Voices from Kavango,' p 162. The repatriated labourers from Kavango submitted all they earned mostly to their fathers to bless the goods before suggesting who would receive what and so forth. Such

eighty-nine year-old former contract labourer, Leonard Shile. He relates further that he grew up believing that wealth without the blessing of parents was meaningless.<sup>618</sup> Likuwa's and Shile's arguments are contradicted by McKittrick who argues that migrant labour and Christianity allowed young men to challenge the authority of their elders, by accruing status and wealth outside the existing channels of age-based exchange and redistribution.<sup>619</sup> Learning how contract labourers throughout this study conducted themselves regarding their relationship with elders<sup>620</sup> however leads me to argue that the emphasis McKittrick places on Christianisation might have led to an exaggeration of this point.<sup>621</sup>

With the exception of racial colonial policies that the migrant labour community experienced, the colonial project is said to have brought immense changes to the lives of Ovambo communities. One of the remarkable changes noted was that of issuing the recruits with blankets as well as clothes, the items are said to have benefited the contract labourers and their families in general.<sup>622</sup> Another crucial change observed was the post-World War 2 policies review, which did not only benefit the administration, but also profited many of the contract workers. After Eedes took over the office of Native Commissioner of Ovamboland from Hahn in 1946, he revised a number of contract labour policies and lessened some of the harsh policies. One of the new strategies was that many prospective recruits who were rejected for minor defects during Hahn's period were recruited to work on farms. Employers

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acquiescence displayed that young ones trusted and relied on elders for guidance in their lives: *shaashi omukuluntu etungwa lya siikilila ombepo*.

<sup>618</sup> Interview with Leonard Shile, 27.05.2016, Alusati, Uukwambi.

<sup>619</sup> Shiweda, 'Omhed: Displacement and Legitimacy', p 138.

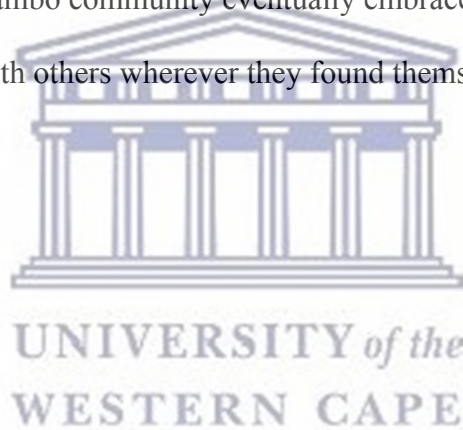
<sup>620</sup> I conclude that contract labourers of the time used to be submissive and hand over to their parents all they earned on contract. See also Likuwa in *Voices from the Kavango*, p 162.

<sup>621</sup> I argue that McKittrick perhaps generalises here when referring to Christian converts, because they constituted the focus of her study. See McKittrick, *To Dwell Secure* and McKittrick, 'Generational Struggles and Social Mobility in Western Ovambo Communities 1915-1945' in Hayes et al (eds), *Namibia under South Africa Rule*.

<sup>622</sup> Shigwedha, 'The Pre-Colonial Costumes of the Aawambo', p 201 indicates that contract labourers were the ones who introduced blankets to Ovamboland that later became part of their bedding. Shigwedha's other argument was that at the turn of the twentieth century, Aawambo that went to work were wearing a combination of tatty European clothes and traditional costumes.

who wanted their workers back in their establishment were encouraged to write them recommendation letters (*omikandapopilo*) at the end of their contracts, which they produced to foremen at the recruitment centre for the next contracts. Such changes saved many from joining long and frustrating queues at *omutete*.

Lastly, I credited the colonial administration for making several formal items of infrastructure available to labourers on contract in the south. Amongst the redirected infrastructure there was the postal services, which the colonial administration readdressed to labourers in *uushimba*, but it ended up being also engaged by Aawambo people in Ovamboland. This conclusion agrees with Vigne's point that infrastructures always do more than they are designed to do.<sup>623</sup> The Aawambo community eventually embraced that colonial facility and used it in communicating with others wherever they found themselves.



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<sup>623</sup> B. Vigne, 'Omeya: Water, Work and Infrastructure in Ovamboland from 1915 to 1968', unpublished MA thesis in Historical Studies, University of Cape Town, 2019, p 2.

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