Abstract
This essay analyses the labour recruitment and shipment of so-called ‘Damara’ people from central Namibia (Damara but also Herero and other people) to the Cape Colony in the 1870s and 1880s. Several hundred men, women and children engaged in the labour recruitment programme of the Cape Government and became indentured at the Cape in households and on farms. The analysis contextualises this particular incident of Namibia labour history in the 19th century in two ways. Firstly, it analyses the labour demand at the Cape and the fate and experiences of ‘Damara’ labourers in the colony and makes reference to communities of ‘Damara’ which finally formed in the colony. Secondly, it analyses the socio-economic context in central Namibia at the time and links labour recruitment to a powerful process of re-pastoralisation in central Namibia accomplished by notably Herero people. In this process, Damara people in the modern sense of the term often became subjugated on violent terms. These relations of dependency during the early German colonial period of the 1890s were transformed into official colonial policies of labour recruitment and subjugation.

Introduction
On 30 October 1879 the schooner *Louis Alfred*, arriving from Walvis Bay, landed 32 people in Cape Town “who by the next day had all found masters”.¹ Over the next three years many more, altogether several hundred men, women and children mainly from central Namibia, arrived in the same way to become indentured as servants and workers in households and on farms in the Cape Colony. They had been recruited by the Cape Government through a labour recruitment programme and upon arrival were listed by the Immigration Agent for the Cape Colony (IAC) as either “Damaras”, “Damara

¹ G. H. Stevens (Contracting & Pass Officer), 5.4.1880, in: Cape of Good Hope, Ministerial Dept. of Crown Lands & Public Works, (ed.), *Report on Native Immigration to the Colony from Extra-Colonial Territories, for the year 1879*, G.71-'80, s.l., 1880: 1. The main body of sources for the ‘Damara shipments’ to the Cape is to be found in the files of the Immigration Agent for the Cape Colony (IAC) and the Native Affairs (NA) files of the Western Cape Provincial Archives (WCPA), Cape Town.

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emigrants”, “natives from Damaraland” or mostly, however, as “Berg-Damaras”. This essay traces their history which so far has received little attention in historiography.\(^2\)

In 19\(^{th}\) century written sources, the term ‘Damara’ referred to people who usually spoke Khoekhoewab and/or Otjiherero, known today as Damara and Ovaherero respectively, whilst ‘Berg-Damara’ referred to only Khoekhoewab-speaking Damara.\(^3\) Damara and Herero lived in much of modern-day Namibia, though mostly in central Namibia or ‘Damaraland’, as the region was then known. The history of the ‘Damara shipments’ from Damaraland to the Cape is tied up with the history of south western Africa’s increasing integration into the expanding capitalist economy of the Cape Colony during the 19\(^{th}\) century. Whilst the developments which characterised the overall integration of south western Africa into an inter-regional economic system are well researched,\(^4\) labour recruitment and other forms of labour migration from this region to the Cape Colony, or, for that matter, to any other region or colony at the time, have received little scholarly attention.\(^5\) The ‘Damara shipments’ refer to the beginnings of a colonial labour recruitment history which subsequently profoundly shaped the lives of Namibians for much of the 20\(^{th}\) century.\(^6\)

Apart from this context, the ‘Damara shipments’ highlight features of the internal dynamics taking place in central Namibia at the time. These were shaped by a dramatic

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\(^3\) On the history of these ethnonyms see my brief explanations below. In this paper I use the term ‘Damara’ in single quotes when referring to the wider concept of Khoekhoewab- and/or Otjiherero-speaking people in Damaraland and when the sources do not allow for a clearer distinction between Damara (‘Berg-Damara’) or Herero in the modern sense. This holds especially true with regard to the sources on the ‘Damara shipments’ to the Cape. For convenience’ sake I use the term Herero instead of Ovaherero and without making a distinction between Otjiherero-speaking Ovaherero and Ovambanderu.


process of re-pastoralisation and the establishment of Herero chiefdoms during the 1870s, with major consequences for notably those people then increasingly being labelled ‘Berg Damara’ or Damara in the modern sense. Apart from reconstructing the recruitment of ‘Damara’ to the Cape and exploring their fate in the Cape Colony, this essay takes their shipment as a focal point for reviewing some longer-term structural developments taking place in central Namibia in the second half of the 19th century. My basic argument is that ‘Damara’ labour recruitment targeted people in central Namibia who were particularly vulnerable to the dramatic changes then taking place.

The main body of sources available is a wealth of written records whose limitations I have discussed elsewhere. Oral recollections in various forms and archives are also abundant although these have not yet been fully explored. My own research limited itself to oral recollections and traditions of Otjiherero-speaking people. They indeed proved vital for an understanding of the complex changes that characterised central Namibia in the 19th century. This limitation, which can be read as an ethnically-bound research-agenda for a region which in the 19th century displayed fluid shifts of identification(s), obviously cushions my findings and arguments. Nevertheless, my focus here is regional and this perspective allowed me in previous research on pre-colonial 19th century central Namibia to conclude that one central outcome of the dramatic structural changes in 19th century Damaraland was the formation of more rigid identity politics, if not identifications for and amongst the African population. As this essay attempts to show, the ‘Damara shipments’ to the Cape were one particular facet of this identity politics.

However, it remains a grave lacuna — not only of my own research — that oral recollections and traditions in Khoekhoewab regarding the 19th century have been very much neglected. For the purpose of this essay I have accessed only the transcribed archives of oral recollections of Africans as accumulated by the missionary Heinrich Vedder at the beginning of the 20th century. Despite their limitations, these archives do yield evidence that the ‘Damara shipments’ formed part of the re-collected experiences of people then living in western Namibia. This is suggested by an interview Vedder conducted in the 1920s in the Otjimbingue area, a mission settlement and reserve in western Namibia, with the “Bergdamara /Ubeb”, born some 80 years earlier. /Ubeb recalled that the Cape Commissioner Coates Palgrave, who was instrumental in the Cape labour recruitment programme for central Namibia in the late 1870s, “put the poor Bergdama, who neither had goats nor cattle, together and sent them with a ship for work to Cape Town”. Importantly, /Ubeb added that some of them returned home at a later stage. In part, then, this essay also draws attention to themes, archives and recollections which warrant more detailed research.

7 Henrichsen, Herrschaft: 36-42.
8 Ibid.: chapters 1 and 3.
9 Still important despite its problematic character is Henrich Vedder, Die Bergdama, 2 vol., Hamburg, Friedrichsen, 1923.
10 NAN, Quellen zur Geschichte Südwestafrikas (Heinrich Vedder), vol. 2: Mündliche Mitteilungen von Eingeborenen über die vorgeschichtliche Zeit, No. 12, 62f.: “[Palgrave] machte die armen Bergdama, die
This essay is in two parts. The first reconstructs the recruitment and shipment of ‘Damara’ to the Cape and explores their fate in the Cape Colony with reference to general developments of the Cape labour market. The second looks at structural developments in central Namibia itself, and it is here that I contextualise the ‘Damara shipments’ with reference to questions relating to agency and structure.

Recruiting ‘Damara’ in central Namibia

Official Cape politics with regard to central Namibia reached a climax in 1878 when the Cape Government annexed the Walvis Bay area on the south west African coast and permanently stationed a magistrate there. The annexation, an outcome of the investigative travels by the “Commissioner of Enquiry” Coates Palgrave in 1876/77 through much of central and southern Namibia, made it possible for the Cape to control, at least partly, the highly lucrative trade between the region and Cape Town.11 The Walvis Bay magistrate obtained the right to exercise customs duties, and from 1877 to 1880 had under his supervision a Cape Resident stationed with the most powerful omuhona (chief) of the region, Kamaharero, at his residential settlement of Okahandja to the north of Windhoek.12 Other economic considerations of the Cape Government revolved around the shortage of labour in the colony, as explained further on in this essay, and which by the late 1870s led to Palgrave’s suggestion to tap into the potential labour pool of Damaraland.

The Cape Government explicitly built its argument for labour recruitment on a prevailing crisis situation in Damaraland. As Palgrave explained,

“the cattle owners [that is, Herero] being very rich and powerful in flocks and herds, oppress the other section of the people [that is, Damara] [...] To prevent their annihilation the Government, through agents at Walwich Bay [sic], made proposal to these people for bringing them to the Cape to work.”13

Labour recruitment, as part of imperial politics, was thus clouded in a humanitarian if not ‘civilising’ mission. For that purpose, James Murray, a former “goaler” from Durbanville, became the “Labour Agent in Damaraland”. He was instructed to set up “a shed” at Rooibank in the Walvis Bay area to become the “first Berg Damara Station”. Murray had to lose “no time in sending messengers up the Khuisip [Kuiseb River] to induce Berg Damaras to come down” and who “are willing to proceed to the Colony as labourers”.14
Another collecting point was envisaged at Anawood along the Swakop River, where Samuel Gertze, a farmer, was residing. The messengers referred to were, amongst others, transport drivers operating between the harbour of Walvis Bay and the mission and trading stations of the hinterland. They were paid between 5 and 10 shillings for each labourer recruited. The “full share” of payment for recruitment was paid to “the Omaruru people”, no doubt Europeans and Herero living at this major trading and mission station. According to Jan-Bart Gewald the Herero ovahona (pl. chiefs) of Omaruru, Tjaherani and Manasse Tjiseseta, were instrumental in this and were “monopolizing control over the export of Berg Damara labour”. As such, the first shipments took place in late 1879, with the Cape Town based company A. Ohlsson & Co being paid to ship the workers to Cape Town. Ohlsson & Co had major trading interests in the whole of south western Africa, with Omaruru being their regional headquarters, and the trader Axel Eriksson, the partner of Ohlsson in Cape Town, being the crucial figure on the spot. One can speculate whether Eriksson earned double from the recruitment programme, as a likely recruiter and employer of numerous transport drivers and as a partner in the shipping company.

Right from the beginning, desertion of recruited ‘Damaras’ took place before they had even reached Walvis Bay. By mid-1880 Palgrave had to report that desertions continued and “there have been so many incredible stories circulating amongst them that it is astonishing that some came up.” Some of those recruited said “they were afraid of being thrown into the sea for the robberies they had committed”, a reference to prevailing violence in western Namibia which is analysed in the second part of this paper. Palgrave thus requested that “some” of those already working in the Cape Colony should be sent back to report to “their fellows” and “to remove their fears of ill treatment etc.”

These, in short, are the sketchy details available on the official recruitment arrangements in Namibia. They provide only glimpses into some of the local participations in and reactions to the arrangements. Official recruitment and shipments stopped in mid-1882. However, in the following years individuals and at times small groups continued to be shipped to the Cape (as many as 120 people in 1890/91), though under...
circumstances which remain unclear and with no reference to the role of the Cape Government itself.23

The shipments
The Cape files of the IAC provide a rough picture of the actual people and numbers involved in the shipments to the Colony. Arrivals in Cape Town soon increased from 32 people in October 1879 to 96 in early April 1880. By July 1882 a total of 14 shipments had been recorded which had taken up to 200 men, over 50 women and perhaps some 100 children from Walvis Bay to Cape Town.24 These figures are probably only an indication of actual numbers. They take no account of the fact that people died during the voyage of up to 14 days, as noted here and there, or that not everybody or even all shipments were recorded. It is thus safe to assume that several hundred individuals arrived in Cape Town up to mid-1882. As we have seen, there would have been more people recruited if the recruiters had not encountered resistance in the recruitment area.

The ‘Damaras’
In general, individual men are listed as having arrived in Cape Town. Not infrequently, however, so-called “families” went ashore; for example “Sunday, wife and 4 children”, “Ruben, wife and 5 children”, or “N'coruru, wife and 3 children”. Children were as young as 3 years. Sometimes individual girls or boys aged 10 or 12 years are listed, like Dartji or Jacko, begging the question why such very young people were seemingly recruited individually. In a few cases an individual woman with a child or children is listed. Categories like “wife”, “children” and “family” are used in the records without allowing for a clearer understanding of the social networks and affiliations existing between the men, women and children involved. Here it is important to stress that contrary to the few comments in existing historiography, not only men arrived at the Cape but also women and children, and even individual youths. This was contrary to other recruitment programmes of the Cape Government at the time which, as explained below, only targeted men.

The names given of the individuals provide clues to their background, although administrative recording of names was probably often completely fanciful. With regard to popular Christian names listed, like Maria, Jacob or Abraham, one has to assume that they did not necessarily refer to Christianised people.25 Typical servants’ names, like Sunday, Africa, Lena or Klaas, Pampoen or Beestewagter, could indicate that these

23 Henrichsen, Herrschaft : 298. See also Gewald, Herero Heroes : 67.
24 I have not counted every individual as listed in the sources. Thus, these figures are estimates only. For the lists see WCPA, IAC, vol. 13.
25 Figures about Christianised Damara are hard to come by for the 1870s. There were very few indeed. The Rhenish Mission concentrated virtually exclusively on Herero, albeit with little success, and there were only some 1500 Christianised Herero by the mid-1880s. See Henrichsen, Herrschaft : Table A.
individuals had been in the service of traders or missionaries before. Easy to identify are corrupted local names like Oorap, Xlabas or Kabangop, which refer to Khoekhoewab-speakers. Of any local names provided, these are indeed the most frequent ones. Other names like Tsharioura (Tjarioura?) or Korosi (Korovi?) indicate a Bantu language background, possibly Otjiherero, although it should be kept in mind that individuals in the multilingual setting of central Namibia at the time could have various names in different languages. In one instance, it is recorded that two “boys” originated from an area “north east of Damaraland”, suggesting that people beyond the region of Damaraland were also shipped to the Cape. These two boys were in fact two !Kung, !nanni and Tamme, who, together with two other !Kung, /uma and Da, had been placed in the household of the well-known Cape ethnographer Lucy Lloyd in Mowbray. Their traumatic recollections of local violence in their home area in the modern border region of Namibia / Botswana / Angola and their final encounter with European traders who brought them to Walvis Bay have recently been reconstructed by Pippa Skotnes. A few other people arriving at the Cape were classified as “Bushmen”, and two were registered as “orphaned Bastard girls”. Thus, although the recruitment project was framed, from the Cape administration side, as being a programme to recruit ‘poor’ Damara, in contrast to, as we shall see, ‘rich’ Herero, it is safe to assume that whilst the majority were regarded as being Khoekhoewab-speaking Damara, not all were in fact Damara or even originating from Damaraland.

Indentured: Their fate at the Cape

Indentured labour as a system of contractual labour was used in the Cape Colony in the late 19th century to recruit and survey workers from outside the colony. Cape records indicate that newly arriving labourers were often placed as “general servants”, or, in the case of individual children, as “apprentices” to “masters” in predominately the western Cape area. Employers were, for example, a J.D.J. Visser at Koeberg, a D. Cloete at Wynberg or a Louis Goete at Newlands. Interestingly, employers also included high ranking Cape officials like Coates Palgrave himself (the 13 year old Jacob and Abraham and his wife Lucy were placed in his services) or the Secretary for Native Affairs, Rose-Innes.

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26 On this see for example ibid.: 384.
27 Lloyd to Stevens, 30.3.1882, WCPA, IAC, vol. 4.
28 Pippa Skotnes, Claim to the country. The archive of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, Johannesburg, Jacana; Athens, Ohio University Press, 2007: 236-271 /uma and Da were brought to Walvis Bay by traders, one being Carew (Karo in their recollections as noted down by Lloyd) who operated for Axel Eriksson. Carew related some of the violence in their home region to Coates Palgrave in February of 1880, in Stals, Commissions: 316. They were probably amongst the “33 Berg Damara” shipped to Cape Town in February 1880 (ibid.: 314) and were placed in the household of Lloyd in March of that year (Skotnes, Claim: 249).
Not all of the ‘Damaras’ were thus assigned as farm labourers as is stated in the historiography though many did seem to have been engaged on farms in various capacities. They were often employed in the wine and wheat districts of the western Cape Colony and thus living in towns and districts like Paarl, Malmesbury, Clanwilliam or Tulbagh, to which some of them had to travel by train. In one case, a “Damara girl” named Hannah eventually moved with her master to Potchestroom in the Orange Free State, where she married locally. Some of the labourers affiliated to each other upon arrival were assigned to different employers.

Government Notice No. 1159 (1879), dated 30 October 1879, stipulated that an applicant for a ‘Damara’ servant had to pay a deposit to the Cape Administration of £3 10s for a single man, and £7 for a family, with or without children, and an extra charge for a family to be used for clothing. The contract of indenture lasted for 2 or 3 years. Wage rates were fixed for single men at 15 shillings per month plus rations, and for a “married man” and family at 20 shillings per month during the first year, 25 shillings for the second and 30 shillings for the third, plus rations for each family member. Such wages seem to have been common at the time for general servants and farm labourers but were lower than wages paid on the copper and diamond mines in the colony, as indicated below. Wages were not paid out on a regular basis to the labourers but seem to have been deposited into a “savings bank” and only paid out after the contract had ended.

The letters of the employers to the Cape administration allow for sketchy, though at times vivid, impressions of the experiences endured by servants and labourers. Rarely, as in the case of “Charlie” working in Newlands, did a labourer complete his/her contract. His master Louis Cloete wrote in May 1882 that “this is to certify that Charlie has served the whole of his time of apprenticeship to me and that he has given the greatest satisfaction during that time.” More often the letters speak of desertion because of so-called theft, laziness, or simply “ontevredenheid” (dissatisfaction) on the part of the workers. In a few instances employers wrote on behalf of their servants in order to establish contact with “friends” or “parents” who had been placed elsewhere; to inquire about the payments to be made to their servants; or to ask for “a pass” for them. One letter recorded the death of “the boy Tembo” at a hospital in Somerset (“Every attention was given to him during his illness” – “I will attend his funeral”). Another letter, written by a John van Renen Jr., reported that “Maria”, “Namassiep’s wife”, had “greatly bothered” him, running away twice, setting fire “to her hut”, and not being “in her proper senses”. As she ran away again, “I don’t wish to have her back since she keeps Namassiep out of work & doesn’t work herself [...] I think

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31 C.W. du Toit to Stephens [sic], 26.5.1884, WCPA, IAC, vol. 4.
34 Louis Cloete, 23.5.1882, WCPA, IAC, vol. 4.
she is more fit for Robbin Island [sic] than anything else."  

Robben Island at that time was an asylum for lunatics and other chronically sick people. In one case it was stated to the administration that a “Damara boy is sent back to you” because “I cannot civilise him – he is the nearest approach to an animal that I think a human being can be [...] I have thrashed him [...] but it is no use and I can stand it no longer”.  

Only one letter speaks of individuals returning home, in this case the two previously mentioned !Kung who returned to Walvis Bay in mid-1882 in the company of the trader Eriksson. They had stayed for two and a half years with Lucy Lloyd in her household in Mowbray, together with the two other !Kung, where they had been servants and informants, if not also teachers to the ethnographer. Lloyd took an interest in virtually every aspect of their former lives and recorded their cultural and linguistic knowledge. She introduced them to aspects of the bourgeois life of Cape Town like the South African Museum, had them photographed and made them produce a wealth of striking sketches and water-colours which in recent years have intrigued an international public. Their experiences obviously differed greatly from the experiences many other ‘Damaras’ had to face. The recollections of /Ubeb quoted above indicate that more ‘Damaras’ in fact did eventually return home.

These letters, first and foremost, refer to some of the administrative machinery at work in order to distribute and survey labourers and to attend to grievances voiced by their masters. They only provide glimpses into the hardships, violence and traumata experienced by the labourers themselves and hardly say anything about actions and options available to them. References to desertion, theft and dissatisfaction, as well as the evidence some labourers finally returned home, do, however, indicate that ‘Damara’ did manipulate their contractual relationships and/or acted on their own accord. Some eventually even formed their own communities at the Cape, as will be explained in the following section.
The Cape economy and Namibian workers in the 19th century

The ‘Damaras’ shipped to the Cape were not the first — or the last — labourers from modern Namibia to work in the Cape Colony. Throughout the 19th century ‘Damara’ worked at the Cape, though mostly, it seems, on an individual basis and not, as in the case of the shipments, by way of official recruitment and indenture. The term ‘Damara’ was an established category amongst the ethnic categorisations used by contemporary Cape writers. Judging from reports in the Cape newspapers, the term did not need to be explained to their readers. The newspaper for a primarily African readership, Imvo Zabantusundu, too, when discussing, for example, bills affecting Africans, included “Damaras” in their listing of “nationalities” residing in the Cape Colony. The category ‘Damara’ referred usually to people from a distant area across the Orange River. As “Pan, a Damara” and agricultural worker from Clanwilliam, who in 1871 was charged in the local court with the murder “of a San”, explained: “I am not a man of this country, but belong to Damaraland”. In fact, some of these workers took on ‘Damara’ as their surname, like “Apollis Damera” who, residing in the 1870s in Pella, stated in court “that he had brought [his wife Maria] […] with him from Damaraland”. Thus, couples and women from Damaraland were working in the Cape Colony before the late 1870s. From the Cape newspapers it also transpires that some continued, at least in court, to speak only “Damara” whilst others could or were willing to also speak Dutch.

The demand for labour at the Cape arose, on the one hand, due to the colony’s rapid agricultural commercialisation since the 1830s. As John Marinowitz has observed, labour intensive industries such as wheat production had increased threefold between the late 1830s and the late 1880s. On the other hand, the mining industry needed an ever increasing number of labourers, notably, from the 1850s onwards, at the copper mines at O’kiep in so-called Namaqualand, and, from the 1860s, at the diamond mines in Kimberley. The mining industry attracted larger numbers of African workers especially from other South African regions like the northern and eastern Transvaal. However, the copper mines at O’kiep included, apart from “Zulus, Hottentots and Bushmen”, also “the various Damara nations”, a clear indication that both Damara and Herero were also

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42 Most common were those labourers from Namibia who came to the Cape Colony with the many trading parties and decided, for whatever reason, to stay on.
43 See, for example, The Cape Argus, 29.10.1874, “Occasional Notes”; ibid.: 31.10.1874.
44 Imvo Zabantusundu, 10.6.1885: 4.
45 The Cape Argus, 21.1.1871: 2, 176.
47 The Cape Argus, 29.10.1874, “Occasional Notes”.
49 On this see, for example, Patrick Harries: Work, Culture, and Identity. Migrant Labourers in Mozambique and South Africa, c.1860-1910, Portsmouth et al., Currey, 1994: ch. 3.
working there.\textsuperscript{50} The diamond mines, according to the existing historiography, seem to have attracted only a few ‘Damaras’, though this cannot be taken for granted and is definitely in need of closer scrutiny.\textsuperscript{51} Since the mines paid higher wages to be attractive, the agricultural sector complained increasingly of losing out in the competition for cheap labour.\textsuperscript{52} Yet, as Marincowitz notes, despite “draconic laws” like various Master and Servant Act Amendments, the efforts by the administration to “create a dependant labour force” for the agricultural sector had largely failed by the 1880s.\textsuperscript{53}

These two sectors were only two economic areas which demanded cheap labour. In general, the colony experienced large scale immigration of, though not only, Africans, large scale food production, rapid urbanisation and modernisation of the Colony’s infrastructure like the construction, from 1874 onwards, of railways, roads and harbours. It was in this context that the Cape Government stepped up organised forms of labour recruitment and introduced indenture systems, targeting in particular specific “border tribes”. The Delagoa Bay and the hinterland of Inhambane in modern Mozambique, and Damaraland in Namibia, were such areas.\textsuperscript{54} As the \textit{Report on Native Immigration to the Colony from Extra-Colonial Territories} for 1879 makes clear, “natives from Damaraland” were needed in order “to supply the great and increasing demand of the agricultural and general labour market, which had not been sufficiently met by the large number of colonial kafirs introduced at the end of the late Gcaleka war”.\textsuperscript{55} To prove his point, the Contracting and Pass Officer pointed out that he already had “considerable money deposits from applicants who are awaiting fresh shipments” from Damaraland. He concluded:

\begin{quote}
The continuing prosperity of the colony and the large increase of population and corresponding requirements of life, as well as the continued applications for labourers that are being made, warrant me in believing that a continuance of the arrangements by which an even flow of native immigration can be maintained to supply a constantly increasing demand is not only desirable but necessary.\textsuperscript{56}
\end{quote}

Recruitment in the Delagoa Bay was successful, with over 2000 men arriving at the Cape from the late 1870s onwards, in contrast to the several hundred people, including women and children, from central Namibia.

\textsuperscript{53} Marincowitz, \textit{Rural production}: 218ff.  
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.: 118ff.  
\textsuperscript{55} G.H. Stevens, 5.4.1880, in: Cape of Good Hope, (ed.), \textit{Report}: 1f.  
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
Apart from what has been reconstructed in this essay so far, there seems to be little additional information on the fate of ‘Damaras’ at the Cape. However, it is important to note that by the early 1890s there existed small ‘Damara’ communities in some places in the Cape Colony, for example a group of 80 to 90 Damara in Wynberg.\(^{57}\) In Constantia, “Damara women” selling vegetables to European households were apparently a common feature at that time.\(^{58}\) In the north-western Cape and notably around Pella, ‘Damara’ in the late 1860s formed a community of fugitives from the area to the north of the Orange River, with evidence, as Jeremy Silvester has observed, of “an independent community i.e. with their own political structures, economic self-sufficiency and spatial territory”.\(^{59}\)

Thus, not all of the recruited labourers returned home and those remaining created distinct communities, perhaps similar to other labour immigrants at the Cape like the “Delagoa Bay men”.\(^{60}\) It would warrant closer research to determine their role in what Patricia Hayes has termed the “long history of trafficking, transhumance and mutual influence” between the areas of modern Namibia and the Cape.\(^{61}\)

**Damaraland in the 1870s**

Damaraland came to be known to Europeans in the 19th century as an area which roughly comprised modern central Namibia between Walvis Bay and Windhoek (Otjomuise in Otjiherero), Gobabis (Epako) to the east, Grootfontein (Otjiwanda Tjongo) to the north east and Ojitambi to the north west. The term ‘Damaraland’ stood in contrast to Great Namaqualand in modern southern Namibia, and both terms lived on in contemporary (Cape) English writing about southwestern Africa for much of the 19th century. Significantly, from the 1850s onwards contemporary German literature substituted ‘Damaraland’ with the term ‘Hereroland’. This signalled a shift in perception and conceptualisation of territory and power relations in central Namibia by primarily the Rhenish Mission operating in the region from the 1840s onwards and was closely related to the advent of Herero hegemony in the region.

The term ‘Damara’ referred in the first half of the 19th century to both ‘Komacha Damaras’ and ‘Chou Damaras’, or ‘Cattle Damaras/Damaras of the Plains’ and ‘Berg Damaras’ respectively. These terms had been coined, it seems, by Nama-Oorlam people, who themselves were in part newcomers to the region. The terms were adopted by Europeans, who in turn attached increasingly clear-cut ethnographies and ethnic

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58 Jackie Loos, “The Way we were – Hilda’s helpful hints made for well-run homes”, *The Cape Argus*, 29 December 2004. Loos refers to information provided in Hilda’s Diary of a Cape Housekeeper”, London, Chapman & Hall, 1902. Thanks to Patrick Harries (Basel) for this reference.
59 Silvester, “Assembling”: 479. For the background of this particular group of ‘Damara’, who today are regarded as the ancestors of the Vaalgras community in southern Namibia, see also ibid.: 477ff.
60 Harries, “Making Mozbiakers”: 112ff.
identifications to these terms and hence for ‘the Ovaherero’ (with reference to the terms ‘Cattle Damara/Damaras of the Plain’) and ‘the Berg Damara’. Elsewhere I have traced the politics of identification behind these terms and their ethnicisation.\textsuperscript{62} Here, it is sufficient to point out that the ethnonyms Herero and Damara initially referred to existing language differences and differences in socio-economic status and habitation. They did not necessarily reflect self-perceptions and, up to the 1850s, did not corroborate with the flexible movements of people of whatever language background between fluid socio-economic positions of livestock-holder and hunter-gatherer. Neither did they reflect specific territorial occupations in the plains and/or mountainous regions. Up to the 1860s, both Damara and Herero as well as, to a certain degree, San, were either livestock holders or hunter-gatherers, or both, in addition to being gardeners and miners, in a highly flexible intra-regional system of economic possibilities and differential territorial occupation.

This flexibility changed with the dramatic process of re-pastoralisation which Otjiherero-speaking people engaged in from the 1860s onwards, and during which they increasingly excluded, on economic, political and territorial levels, not only Damara but also other inhabitants of central Namibia like San.\textsuperscript{63} Aspects of social distance and stigmatisation also played a role in these processes, as attested by both European sources and oral testimonies from Herero and Damara people for this period.\textsuperscript{64} In effect, the outcome in the 1870s and 1880s was an increasingly rigid categorisation of identity politics in central Namibia. Theoretically, such a process enabled “the dominant grouping [read here: Otjiherero-speaking people] [to] constitute both itself and the subordinate population [read here: Damara and other people] as classes”, as Jean and John Comaroff have observed in respect to similar processes in southern Africa. “[W]hatever the prior sociological character of these aggregations, they are, in the process, actualized as groups an sich.”\textsuperscript{65} The shipment of predominately Khoekhoewab-speaking Damara to the Cape is one of the concrete outcomes of this process, as we shall see further on.

The dramatic process of re-pastoralisation amongst Otjiherero-speaking people from the 1860s onwards led to the establishment of a consolidated cattle economy in southern central Namibia in the 1870s as well as an ideologically constructed ‘\textit{ehi \textit{r}Ovaherero}’ (the land of the Ovaherero).\textsuperscript{66} This ‘\textit{ehi \textit{r}Ovaherero}’ was not synonymous with the concept of ‘Hereroland /Damaraland’ promoted in European literature; it defined, from the idealised point of view of Otjiherero-speakers, a vast area where Herero, as far as

\textsuperscript{62} Henrichsen, \textit{Herrschaft}:10-19.
\textsuperscript{63} Much of what follows here is based on my PhD. See Henrichsen, \textit{Herrschaft}: ch. 2.
\textsuperscript{64} On this see ibid.: 72ff.
memory went, once lived and could in future live again. The concept of an ‘ehi \( \bar{O} \) va\( \bar{O} \)herero’ excluded on an ideological level the rights of any other people to pasture and water points. It formulated historical rights and claims which could, when put into praxis, be utilised, negotiated or violently usurped, depending on the specific political and military situation.

The process of re-pastoralisation took place, as is well known, in the context of mercantile capitalism expanding from the Cape Colony. In contrast to processes of underdevelopment in southern Namibia at the time, Herero managed to consolidate their livestock wealth and at the same time engage in new trading and hunting possibilities by acquiring huge numbers of guns, many horses and, to a lesser degree, ox wagons. As such, then, Herero society became both a cattle and gun society and thus controlled, from the 1870s onwards, central means of power and resources in the region.\(^67\) The consequences were dramatic, notably for Damara people.

One effect of the newly established cattle economy was an increasing need for labour, in particular herders, for the rapidly increasing herds. As missionaries observed in the mid-1870s, Herero social networks could no longer provide the necessary labour and so-called Ovatjimba, meaning ‘poor’ Otjiherero-speaking herders, increasingly became Herero, meaning well-off cattle herders themselves. Hence Damara, San and even Ovambo herders from northern Namibia were being integrated as labourers.\(^68\) Written, and to a lesser degree, oral accounts indicate that notably Damara were increasingly incorporated on violent terms. Herero in the late 1870s started to raid Damara villages in south western Namibia and/or to extract tribute in order to gain access to additional labour but also water points and pastures, thereby often stripping Damara communities of any stock they possessed. At the same time, hunting possibilities in central Namibia, which had always been an important subsistence and production strategy, had decreased substantially due to hunting commandos of both European traders and Herero. The latter were using their access to guns and horses to generate new forms of income in addition to their cattle economy. Not surprisingly, Herero, for example in the Otjozondjupa region, tried to prevent Damara labourers from obtaining guns.\(^69\) Europeans noted that whilst Herero society was “overstocked” with guns, Damara in the 1870s hardly possessed any modern weapons.\(^70\)

The quest for additional labour and pasture evolved, by the late 1870s and throughout the 1880s, into small-scale wars between Herero commandos and Damara communities, notably in north western Namibia.\(^71\)

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\(^{67}\) On this which is a very brief summary of highly complex processes and involving not only the establishment of a consolidated cattle society but also the emergence of what I term a gun society amongst Herero see Henrichsen, “Ozongombe”. Also Henrichsen, \textit{Herrschaft} : 385ff.

\(^{68}\) Henrichsen, \textit{Herrschaft} : 211f.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.: 293.

\(^{70}\) Ibid.

\(^{71}\) Ibid.: 268, 271ff.
extermination" (Vertilgungskrieg) by Herero commandos against Damara.\textsuperscript{72} To be sure, bitter counter-raids by Damara were likewise recorded. If not integrated into tribute systems and/or as herders, Damara communities fled to areas in the Outjo-Etosha-Region where the Swartbooi group under kaptein Petrus Swartbooi held some influence, and to more inaccessible mountainous areas throughout central Namibia.\textsuperscript{73} Here, it is important to note that, as far as written sources allow judgment, by the mid-1870s the regional system of central Namibia was characterised by an increasing gap between herders, who possessed increasing herds and controlled various modern means of production, and those who became marginalised with regard to access to pastures, water points and new means and forms of production. Notably Damara (and San) experienced these processes of marginalisation and impoverishment. It is, however, important to stress that not all Damara groups were similarly affected and some groups in north-central Namibia retained cattle herds even in the early 1890s whilst others in southern Namibia kept small livestock herds and “many gardens”.\textsuperscript{74} As has been observed in existing historiography, Damara communities in the 19th century showed a high degree of fragmentation and flexibility, both politically and economically.\textsuperscript{75} For contemporary Europeans, however, the general picture they presented in the late 1870s was clear-cut: Damara were regarded as being “neither herders nor hunters” (missionary Viehe), or, as the Cape Commissioner Palgrave wrote in 1876: “[T]hey have as a rule neither cattle nor sheep.”\textsuperscript{76} Viehe in 1892, after nearly 20 years of residence in Omaruru and Otjimbingue, came to the conclusion that “slave-like relations” existed in central Namibia between Herero and Damara and that although there existed “more well-off Damara amongst the Herero”, in general they were “powerless and without means”.\textsuperscript{77} Three incidents highlight the general marginalisation and impoverishment of Damara in the late 1870s and 1880s. The first incident refers to a severe drought which from 1879 affected people notably in western Namibia. As Europeans recorded, it was predominantly Damara who experienced not only severe hunger but also “the death of hunger because veldkos had not grown for a couple of years”.\textsuperscript{78} The trader Axel Eriksson wrote to Palgrave in October 1879 that “[t]he Berg Damaras are starving, my

\textsuperscript{72} Brincker to Inspektor, 20.9.1882, AVEM, 1.594, fol. 2.
\textsuperscript{73} Henrichsen, Herrschaft : 272ff.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.: 292.
\textsuperscript{75} On this see the overview provided by Ivan Gaseb, “A historical hangover. The absence of Damara from accounts of the 1904-08 war”, in: Wolfram Hartmann, (ed.), More new historical writing in Namibia. Windhoek, History Research Paper No 3, 1999: 5-21 (8f).
\textsuperscript{76} Viehe to Fabri: “Die Bergdamara im Hereroland als Object der Mission”, July 1883, AVEM 1.603; Palgrave to Governor, 15.10.1876, 63, WCPA, NA 1139.
\textsuperscript{78} Viehe to Inspektor, 25.11.1879, AVEM 1.603: “sterben den Hungertod, weil seit Jahren keine Feldkost gewachsen ist”. 77
store is breached from morning to night with living skeletons”. He added that the European population engaged in collecting food for them “until the next rainy season”. This indicates a local famine catastrophe which seemingly lasted until 1883.

At the same time, missionaries in south western Namibia recorded massive stock thefts by Damara against Herero stock posts and were talking of a general “Berg-Damara plague” (missionary Böhm). It was also noted that if Herero commandos could not recapture them, raided livestock was slaughtered by the raiders, a clear indication that apart from the prevailing famine amongst Damara it was difficult, due to retaliation and mountainous environments, to keep stock. In 1880, Böhm wrote that Damara

> are the war hyenas; they are everybody's workers [...] Whites, Bastards, Herero and Nama kill of them every year and if one knows of the actions of the Berg Damara one cannot be surprised about this [...].

His thinking reflected the violence of what was happening in southern Damaraland when he demanded “that in future [...] there shouldn’t exist any free Berg Damara behind or on the mountain”. Thus he effectively argued for the subjugation of Damara.

The thriving Damara community in Okombahe during the 1870s also experienced increasing impoverishment. Importantly, its existence was dependent on annual tribute payments to the Herero chief of Omaruru and other omunene (great men). As the Damara chief Cornelius Goreseb recalled in 1894, the Okombahe community of the 1870s had to bring an annual wagon load of corn to Omaruru, whilst in the 1880s in addition to several bags of corn also tobacco and calabash, or an ox.

The chief remarks that these tribute payments referred only to the people living in Okombahe. The Bergdamara [sic] living on the surrounding places had to pay [extra] to notably Manasse [omuhona Manasse Tjiseseta] and their masters.

These masters were local Herero owanene like Daniel Kariko. Since the early 1880s he had made it clear, politically and by means of organised raiding commandos, that the area, including any stock, belonged to him, and that the Damara were his labourers. In this situation, the population of Okombahe lost much of their stock and in the 1880s disintegrated, moving either into the areas of the Erongo and Brandberg mountains, or to the Outjo area, or dispersed to mission stations in southern Damaraland.

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79 A.W. Eriksson to Palgrave, 25.10.1879, WCPA, NA 1140, 263.
80 Böhm to Inspektor, 7.12.1880, AVEM 1.597, fol. 5: “[Damara] sind die Kriegshänen, sie sind jedermans Knecht [...] Es werden von Weissen, Bastards, Herero und Nama jedes Jahr von ihnen toedgeschossen u. kennt man das Thun der Bergdamara so verwundert man sich eben nicht darüber;”
81 Ibid.: Böhm to Inspektor, 18.2.1881, Memorandum: “dass es künftig [...] keine freien Bergdamara mehr hinter oder auf dem Berge geben dürfe;”
82 On Okombahe in the 1870s see Henrichsen, Herrschaft : 294f., and the references provided there.
83 Goreseb to Leutwein, 17.12.1894, NAN, ZBU W.II.d.10, 111ff: “Der Häuptling bemerkt, dass bei diesen Abgaben nur von den Abgaben der auf Okombahe wohnhaften Leute die Rede ist. Die Bergdamara auf den umliegenden Plätzen mussten besonders an Manasse u. ihre Herren zahlen”.
84 Ibid.: Volkmann to Leutwein, 6.8.1895, 136ff. See also “Kirchenchronik von Okombahe”, ELON, RMS V.22-1, 3, 7; Baumann to Inspektor, 27.10.1885, AVEM 1.602.
85 Henrichsen, Herrschaft : 295.
This, then, was the situation in which the Cape recruitment programme targeted people and especially ‘Damara’ from 1879 onwards. Obviously, the labour recruitment to the Cape must have been a realistic option for at least some in Damaraland experiencing increasing marginalisation, impoverishment and acute famine. The ‘Damara shipments’ as such are the second incident to highlight the increasingly difficult and, indeed, violent character of relations in central Namibia. From the scant reports available and referred to at the beginning of this paper it is not clear exactly how, with what promises and on what terms workers and others were recruited. Given, on the one hand, the ‘incredible reports’ which quickly circulated in Damaraland, and, on the other hand, the crisis situation, one can conclude that various reasons might have led ‘Damara’ to accept, on voluntary terms or under threat, boarding ships for the Cape, or to resist. It seems possible that ‘families’ or even individual women and their children saw labour recruitment as a survival strategy to escape hunger and/or raids and/or integration into the expanding Herero cattle economy. One can also ask whether families who remained in Damaraland purposefully ‘placed’ individual children with recruiters, as was a common strategy at least in the pastoral societies of central Namibia. It also seems possible, however, that many had no choice but to accept recruitment due to violent measures employed, for example, by European and Herero recruiters who, as we saw, received payments for each individual brought to the Walvis Bay area. Here it is important to note that various local and regional factors, environmental, political, economic and military, contributed to both the specific crisis situation in Damaraland and the shipment of labourers to the Cape. Developments beyond this, however, relate to the increasing structural marginalisation and impoverishment of people who were without the vital means of subsistence and production, notably cattle and guns. This structural development was accompanied by an increasing stereotyping and stigmatisation of ‘Damara’ who were forming, as missionary Meyer expressed it in 1892, the “working class” (arbeitende Klasse) in the region.86 How far this view fed into the early colonial context is highlighted by a third incident which brings to the fore the longer term consequences of the developments taking root in central Namibia.

Creating an incipient colonial “working class”

In 1891 the German authorities forbade the “recruitment” and “export” of “Berg-Damara and other natives” from German South West Africa.87 The reason was obvious: The new colonial government itself needed labour for the construction of military stations and it comes as no surprise that in November 1894 Governor Leutwein and omuhona Manasse Tjiseseta entered into an agreement which transformed pre-colonial relations between Herero omunene and Damara people of the region into colonially

87 Verordnung 175-1891, NAN, ZBU W.I.f.1., vol. 2022. See also Official Journal, 23.3.1891, WCPA, 1/WLB 6/1. However, despite this regulation, individual men continued to be shipped to the Cape from Walvis Bay. See Cleverly to Under-Secretary for Native Affairs, 25.1.1893, WCPA, NA 221.
sanctioned labour, if not class, relations. Tjiseseta agreed to hand over Okombahe and adjacent pastures to the colonial government in return for an annual payment of the extraordinary sum of 1,000 Mark. “In addition the German Government takes over the tribute payments of the Captain of the Bergdamara in Okombahe to the Captain of Omaruru [Tjeseseta].”88 These were estimated at 900 Mark in value. Finally, the agreement stipulated that Okombahe would be given as usufruct to the Damara living there, with the “obligation, to provide labourers for government services”.89 Expressly exempted from this obligation were those Herero also residing in Okombahe. The obligation of the Okombahe Damara to provide labourers for government services was afterwards sealed in a separate contract between Leutwein and the Damara chief Cornelius Goreseb.90

These two agreements, according to my knowledge, are the only contracts of their kind in the history of German South West Africa. They transferred pre-colonial dynamics of marginalisation into colonial relationships of dependency, and as such cemented them. Even if in this case only the Damara residents of the Okombahe area were subjected to the stipulation of providing labour to the colonial government, it was not a coincidence that Damara became the first people who were forced to enter into a labour contract with the colonial government. Neither were the shipments of ‘Damara’ or their so-called ‘emigration’ to the Cape accidental. Their recruitment for the Cape and the German colonial government resulted from the intertwining interests of expansion and hegemony of both colonial governments and various Herero chiefs.

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